EAST WIND

AMY LOWELL

Wallace Ness Jamie

EAST WIND

Books by Amy Lowell

PUBLISHED BY

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Poetry

EAST WIND

WHAT'S O'CLOCK

LEGENDS

PICTURES OF THE FLOATING WORLD

CAN GRANDE'S CASTLE

MEN, WOMEN AND GHOSTS

SWORD BLADES AND POPPY SEED

A DOME OF MANY-COLOURED GLASS

A CRITICAL FABLE

(IN COLLABORATION WITH FLORENCE AYSCOUGH)

FIR-FLOWER TABLETS: POEMS TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE

Prose

TENDENCIES IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

SIX FRENCH POETS: STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

JOHN KEATS

EAST WIND

BY

AMY LOWELL

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EAST WIND

THE DOLL

You know, my Dear, I have a way, each Summer
When leaves have changed from ecstasies in green
To something like a crowd with raised umbrellas
Pushing for places at a theatre door,
Whenever there's a reasonable wind —
And when there isn't, why I think it's worse,
They droop so underneath the copper sun
Sitting upon them like a metal cover;
I think the trees look positively tired
Holding the mass of them up all the time.
Well, as I say, when every breeze is smothered
By heavy, lagging leaves on dusty trees,
And all I smell is asphalt and hot tar,
And motor horns destroy the moonlight nights,
I pack myself, and some stray sheets of music,

Into a train and hie me to South Norton.
I came from there, and little drowsy town
Although it is, I still go back (or used to)
And find it with a narrow odd contentment
As grey and glistening as it always was,
Some of it painted, some a silver shimmer
Of weathered clapboards melting to decay.
There always is a blaze of Summer flowers
Cramming the dooryards — stocks and portulaca,
And golden glow above the first floor windows,
And China asters mixed with marigolds.
White paint looks very well indeed behind them
And green blinds, always down, you understand,
South Norton people will not risk the daylight
Upon their best room furniture, and really
When you possess an inlaid teak-wood table,
With mother-of-pearl and ebony in squares,
And on it, set precisely in their order,
Stand ivory chess-men, red and white, the queens

A pair of ancient Maharanies copied
To every quaintness of their grand attire
And not a button or embroidery
Skimped by the Hindu carver; when your chairs
Are waxed as never chair is waxed to-day,
And there are corners lit by golden silks,
And mandarin fruit-dishes in high glass cupboards,
Perhaps you may at least be half forgiven
For only opening the room for weddings
Or when some guest from Boston comes to call.
I have called often in such drawing-rooms,
Confused at first by coming from the dazzle
Of a white August sea, and almost groping
To find my hostess in the green-blind dusk,
While all the time my nose was being grateful
For the great puffs of pot-pourri and cloves,
The gusts of myrrh, and sandalwood, and ginger
Invisibly progressing up and down.
These scented rooms are just a paraphrase

Of something penetrant, but never clear,
Never completely taken nor rejected,
Unrealized flotsam of the tides of trade;
And these frail, ancient ladies are like tea-dust
Left in the bottom of a painted chest,
Poor fluttering souls, surrounded by their "things,"
Oblivious of the sea which brought them here.
My Dear, I prose, you really must not let me,
For after all I have something to say.
I never make these duty calls until
My music lessons are a week away
And each day's mail is stuffed with pupils' letters
Asking for dates and prices, then I go
The rounds and drink a dish of tea with each
Old fragile chrysalis and so come home.
For many years I've always ended up
With the two Misses Perkins. They were a whiff
Of eighteen-forty, and I rather liked
To talk to them and then come back and play

Debussy, and thank God I had read Freud;
The contrast was as genial as curry.
I only wish that I could make you see them,
Their garden path with spice-bushes and lilacs,
The scraper by the door, the polished knocker,
And then the hall with the model of a clipper
Upon a table in a square glass case.
She is a replica of the "Flying Dolphin"
And Captain Perkins made her on a voyage
Of eighteen months to China and Ceylon,
Miss Julia just remembers when he brought
The model home and put it where it stands.
I always laid my gloves upon the table
Just by the clipper's stern, and stood my sunshade
Against the corner, and tiptoed up the stairs.
Miss Perkins was an invalid, for years
She had not left her bed, so I was summoned
Up slippery stairs and over cool, long matting
Into her room, and there in a great four-poster

The little lady would greet me with effusion.
"Clara, Dear, how good of you to come,
Julia and I were wondering if you would.
You'll have a cake and a small glass of sherry.
Hannah will bring them in directly. Now
How is the music getting on? To think
You play at concerts! Julia and I read
About your triumphs in the newspapers."
And all the time, behind the house, the sea
Was moving — moving — with a long, slow sound.
I could not hear it, but I clung to it,
For naturally this room looked on the street.
It was a pretty room with bright glazed chintz,
And Naples bay in staring blue gouache,
Flanked by Vesuvius at night, both pictures framed
In peeling gold. Upon the mantelpiece
Were silhouettes: the Captain and his wife,
Miss Perkins and Miss Julia in pantalettes,
A China bear for matches, and a clock

Suspended between alabaster pillars.
But what I never could keep long from seeing
Was a large wax doll, dressed in the Paris fashion
Of sixty years ago, with a lace tippet
And much-flounced skirt over a crinoline,
Upright in a winged arm-chair by the bed.
She sat and gazed with an uncanny ardour
Straight at the andiron, her hands palms upward,
Her feet in heelless slippers wide apart.
She fascinated me. Those blue glass eyes
Had an unearthly meaning, staring straight
Before her in her faded finery.
I had to draw a chair up from the wall,
For never did Miss Perkins or Miss Julia
Suggest that I should sit in the winged chair.
I found my mind all drawn upon a focus,
I thought wax doll and very nearly said so,
And I am very much afraid I missed the point
Of one or two quite artless little sallies.

They never said a word, and I with rigour
Suppressed my curiosity and merely listened
With sometimes half a mind and sometimes none.
I drank the sherry and I eat the cake,
I kissed Miss Perkins when I came to go,
Bending over the bed, my skirt just touching
The doll, I think, and then the call was over.
Of course at first the thing made no impression.
I thought they had been clearing out the attic
And come upon the doll; but when each year
She was still sitting there, I grew to dread
Encountering her, she seemed so full of tales,
Tell-tales of maiden ladies left alone
With still things on the walls and mantelpieces
And nothing moving round them but the sea
Kept out of reach beyond the matted entry.
One year, in early April, coming in
All flushed with having played Moussorgski's "Pictures"

To an enthusiastic audience,
I found a black-edged letter on my table,
Miss Julia writing that "Dear Sister Jane
Had passed away, she wanted me to know."
The words were quaintly quiet and resigned,
The slim and pointed writing very calm,
But still there seemed a wistful hint of dread.
I knew, in fact, Miss Julia was alone.
I wrote — oh, what one always writes, the things
One does not think, and does not want to think.
I sent the letter, and the answer came
As slim, and pointed, and reticent as ever.
And that was all until I reached South Norton.
Of course I went at once to see Miss Julia.
She greeted me beside the clipper-ship,
And there was something grim about that vessel
Placidly sailing on its painted waves
With coffins passing through the door beside it,
From time to time, while nothing ever came.

I wondered what would be its fate, some junk-shop
Probably, when Miss Julia too had gone.
Poor soul, she seemed to flicker with excitement
And sorrow all in one. The great importance
Of doing something which was not commanded
Appeared in vague authoritative gestures
Which seemed but half controlled and faded off
Into a quiver of movement so pathetic
It made me want to cry. She begged me
To go upstairs. "I cannot bear to be
In any other room but Jane's," she told me.
"I've sat there so much with her, quite ten years
It was she did not leave it." So we mounted
The broad old stairs, and softly trod the matting,
Walking gently as in a house of mourning.
I was resentful, it was four full months
Since I had got that lonely little letter.
Was this a mausoleum? Was Miss Julia
To find her only company with ghosts?

The gaudy paper of the narrow hallway,
Flashing its minarets to a sapphire Heaven
Seemed to be mocking us with Eastern splendour,
With Eastern customs and an Eastern languor.
The conch shells roared a siren song of oceans,
Flanking the newel posts, as we passed by them.
Miss Jane's room was a lovely blaze of sunlight,
The empty bed was orderly and sane,
The Bay of Naples gladdened without hurting.
I shook myself free of the swarming stillness
And saw with satisfaction that the chair,
The doll chair, had been moved, it stood beside
The window with its back toward the room.
Why did I walk up to it? I don't know.
Some feeling that the usualness of streets
Comes kindly over a long spent emotion
Perhaps. At any rate, I did so, saying
How bright and gay the portulacas were,
Or something of the sort. And then I started

To sit down in the chair and saw the doll
With palms stretched out and little slippered feet
Pointing before her. There she sat, her eyes
Fixed glassily upon the window-pane.
I may have jumped, at any rate Miss Julia
Flushing a painful pink said steadily:
"It was so dull for her after Jane died,
I moved her here where she could see the street.
It's very comforting to watch the passing,
I think. I always find it so." That's all,
I don't know how the visit went, nor what
I said, nor where I sat. I only know
I took the train that evening back to town
And stayed up half the night playing Stravinsky.
I dreamt wax doll for three weeks afterwards,
And I shall go to London this vacation.

THE HOUSE IN MAIN STREET

You want I should tell yer 'bout old James Boott, do yer, boys?
Well, 'tain't much of a story, I guess,
But I ain't never fergot it.
Hitch yer cheer up t' th' stove, Sam.
And, 'Lige, you fetch that cracker-box out o' th' corner,
Two o' you can set on that.
Now jest wait a mite till I git my pipe a-drawin' —
Ther'!
Well, you know I warn't raised here,
My father didn't hold with farmin'.
He was a carpenter over to Pelham,
An' I was a real town boy all my growin' up
Only Pelham warn't near th' city 'tis now.
It set in th' middle o' a great space o' fields

An' I couldn't never ha' done with runnin' over 'em.
I'd hire out with th' farmers fer Saturday afternoons,
An' I never was so happy as when I was hoein' beans,
Or pitchin' hay,
Or beatin' a tin pan when a beehive swarmed.
I can see th' critters now,
Black, an' gold, an' buzzin'.
They was like sparks from a pin-wheel,
All scatterin' up in th' sunlight,
An' th' great trees bendin' over 'em like butterfly nets.
No, I couldn't relish carpenterin',
An' when th' time come fer me to fix on a trade
I went to farmin';
An' I been at it fifty year now,
Fifty year o' freeze, an' thaw, an' drought.
Well! Well! 'Tain't no bed o' eider-down, farmin' ain't,
An' that's th' Lord's truth.
Now don't you worrit me, Sam,

I'll git to James Boott presently.
When we old fellers once starts in rememberin',
Ther' ain't no beginnin' nor end, I guess.

James Boott was a fine man to look at,
Bearin' his years right smart,
Only fer a stoop he had,
An' a lameness th' rheumatiz settled on him.
But he was queer as Dick's hat-band.
He come by it straight 'nough;
One o' his brothers shot himself,
An' t'other died in th' 'sylum,
But old James warn't really mad,
He was jest diff'rent.
He had a mint o' money,
All his own an' what his brothers lef' him,
But for all that he boarded in a couple o' rooms to
Parson Tole's.
He could ha' bought half th' town

Ef he'd been so minded,

As 'twas he owned a house,

An' I do think 'twas th' prettiest house I ever see.

It stood right up in th' main street,

With th' Common jest acrost th' road;

Th' Court House cornered it one end,

An' Parson Tole's church, with th' new spire peekin' over th' barberry hedge,

Was on th' South side.

'Twas a mighty fine house,

An' tidy warn't th' word fer th' way James Boott kep' it.

He had th' box borders either side th' stone path to th' front door

As flat an' square as a plate.

An' my, but th' hollyhocks he had under th' winders!

They was as big an' bright es ef they was stamped chintz

An' not jest wood an' sap.

Nobody ever see 'em fade.

One day they was ther'

An' th' next day they warn't,

An' that was all ther' was to it.

'Twas th' same way with all th' flowers,

Pansies, an' gillyflowers, an' snapdragons,

Nobody ever could pint out a faded flower

In James Boott's yard.

It costs a sight o' money

To keep things redded up that way,

But James had th' money,

An' his yard showed it.

Why, even th' laylocks warn't let ripen;

I never see nothin' like it.

Seemed es ef th' place was painted on cardboard

An' held to th' drawin'.

He was pertic'lar 'bout th' house-paintin' too,

He couldn't never abide no blisters

An' 'twas all burnt down to th' bare wood

Every time it needed a new coat.
That paintin' brought it out elegant;
Ther' was th' pilasters, an' th' twisted tops o' th' pillars,
As spick an' span as washed ivory.
But th' blinds was al'ays shut,
An' that made th' house seem kind o' lonesome
Spite o' th' grand bloomin' o' th' flowers.
I guess 'twas a little mite sad fer him too.
Folks said he'd bought it to marry on,
An' then he never did marry.
But ther' set th' house,
Starin' at him with its white paint
An' sort o' pintin' back'ards.
I guess when he bought it, it told him "Bimeby, Bimeby," all th' time,
But afterwards it fairly hollered, "Too late!"
It stood like a lady all 'dizened up fer a party
An' carryin' a bouquet,

But when you come to look at her, she was blind.
I mind I used to think 'twas awful creepy
When th' moon dazzled it of a June evenin'.
An' th' flowers was noddin', an' jostlin',
An' whisperin'.
I used to commence runnin' at th' Court House
An' keep on clear past th' church
When I had to pass it.
An' that was queer too,
Fer Joseph Peters, th' hired man,
Lived in th' back part,
An' I'd go in once in a while with young Joe
An' git a ginger-cookie.
Mrs. Peters liked us to come in.
Maybe she felt lonesome with that great, empty,
echoin' house
Behind her.
Yer see, boys,
The kitchen part give on a lane

So we didn't have to go through the yard at all.
Even Joe didn't care about th' front after sunset.
'Twas like two houses,
One livin' an' one dead,
An' th' dead house meant th' most, I guess.

I was goin' on fer twelve year old
When a new doctor come to Pelham.
He'd had hospital trainin' down to Boston,
An' only fer his havin' a weak heart
He'd never ha' left th' city.
'Twas a fine thing fer Pelham to git him.
He was full o' notions 'bout sprains an' fevers,
An' one o' them was that th' old doctor's house was a
pesky little place
Fer th' likes o' him,
He must have somethin' better.
Well, boys, you know how 'tis,
Most o' th' houses was lived in a'ready,

So Doctor Busby he peered roun' and roun'
But couldn't hit on a place to suit him
'Ceptin' James Boott's house,
An' that he fixed his mind to
Till ther' warn't no movin' him.
Folks told him 'twouldn't do,
That James wouldn't sell,
But he only said, "Tut! Tut! We'll see,"
And walked off down th' street, steppin' out real jaunty
In a way he had.

One day I was shootin' marbles all alone,
Playin' one hand ag'in t'other,
In th' drive by th' Court House,
When I seed 'em comin'.
Doctor Busby was hustlin' 'long with his big stride,
An' James Boott was creepin' toward him
Tappin' th' flags with his malaccer stick.

I guess 'twas th' tappin' o' th' stick
Made me look up.
They stopped jest opposite th' white house
An' I thought it 'peared brighter'n usual
With th' big, shiny clouds blowin' over th' chimblies.
"Good-mornin', Mr. Boott," says Dr. Busby.
"Good-mornin', Doctor," says James.
An' 'twas jest like a little fife
Answerin' a big bass drum.
Well, th' doctor started right in sayin' he wanted to
buy th' house.
And James listened to him,
Leanin' on his stick, an' sort o' quiverin'.
Leastways I thought he quivered,
But maybe 'twas only th' shadows o' th' leaves from
th' great elm-tree
Dancin' on his shoulders.
"Th' house ain't fer sale," says James,
Short and quick.

"But you don't live in it," persisted th' doctor.
"My hired man does," snapped James,
An' jerked up as though fer walkin' on.
"But, my dear sir," the doctor was al'ays polite
Even when he was drawin' a tooth,
"Surely you ain't a-goin' to keep a valuable house
empty
Jest fer th' sake o' your servant?"
Now that's what all Pelham had been saying fer years
But nobody hadn't never durst say it to James afore.
"That, Dr. Busby, is my affair," the old man lashed
out,
An' I declare he was stan'in' up as straight as a new
willer shoot,
An' gimletin' his eyes right into th' doctor.
I cal'late Dr. Busby thought he'd gone too fer,
Fer he started praisin' th' hollyhocks an' dahlias,
An' after a while he got round to th' way th' house was
built,

An' kep' a-speakin' o' Doric columns, an' th' fan-light
over th' door,
An' a heap o' things I couldn't understan'.
I could see th' old gentleman was pleased,
But when th' doctor come to money
He shied like a colt
An' turned off on to somethin' else quick as a flash.
I declare I felt es ef I was to a badger-baitin'.
The doctor he up an' at it ag'in and ag'in,
But James give him the slip every time.
An' all th' while th' little shadows kep' bobbin' over
'em,
An' th' great clouds breezin' above.
I call to mind I watched 'em
An' tried to figger out how many men like them two
Could stand on one of 'em.
Boys do have queer fancies sometimes.
Well, the long an' th' short o' it was
That th' doctor didn't git ahead a mite.

It made me chuckle
To think o' that old man, teeterin' on his cane
An' not able to take a step without it,
Jest blockin' th' way fer that great big doctor.
In th' end he give over an' 'lowed he was beaten.
"I see you won't sell," says he,
"But maybe at least you'll let me see th' inside o' that
beautiful house, Mr. Boott."
I 'most squealed at that;
I'd 'bout come to believin' ther' warn't no inside.
Old James he stroked his chin.
"It's a handsome house,
A handsome house, doctor,
But I ain't kep' it up inside," he says.
That fair riled me,
Not kep' up th' inside,
With all th' outside fixed like a parlour!
But th' doctor didn't seem to care,
He said the woodwork would be ther'

An' th' chimbley-pieces.

'Twarn't woodwork an' chimbley-pieces I was set on,

But my ears was fit to bust listenin', jest th' same.

I wondered would James hit him with his cane,

Or would he take him into th' Court House

An' have th' law on him fer trespassin'.

But he didn't do neither.

He jest turned a sort o' dark pink

All over his wrinkled face,

An' then he said, hollow-like,

"Very well, Dr. Busby,

I will take you into th' house.

Would four o'clock on Thursday afternoon suit you?"

The doctor said 'twould,

An' then they parted.

I heer'd th' tappin' o' that malaccer cane

Fer three good minutes after th' doctor's steps

Had stopped soundin' in th' other direction.

I guess Thursday was awful long a-comin' ter me,
Fer, you understan', I'd made my mind up
To see th' house too.
So I sized up that yard
Same as though I was huntin' fer a jack-knife I'd lost.
I squatted behind th' flower beds
An' squeezed under th' bushes,
An' when four o'clock Thursday come
I was ther';
But I guess 'twould ha' taken more'n old James
Boott's eyes ter see me
Even with his spectacles on.
I can't tell you how I felt when I heer'd th' key
Strikin' on th' lock.
I couldn't see nothin' where I was hidin',
But I'd heer'd th' malaccer cane a-comin'
Way down th' road,
An' I was ready.

I declare I git gooseflesh now,

Jest rememberin' th' awful moan th' door give

When James pushed it open.

'Twas like a livin' thing cryin' out,

An' somethin' come rushin' out o' that door too,

Damp an' musty,

An' ther' warn't nothin' at all.

'Twas mortal hard fer me to git up and go in,

But I did.

They was ahead o' me,

I could hear 'em talkin' in one o' th' rooms.

Oh, Lor! How queer that house was!

'Twas August,

But that hall was so cold my teeth chattered,

An' th' floor felt funny.

'Twas like walkin' on velvet,

An' th' softness give me a dret'ful start.

You see I was barefoot,

An' th' dust was so thick

It oozed up between my toes
An' sucked me down,
The way snow does.
'Twas dark too,
'Count o' th' shut blinds,
Didn't seem like th' same world was outside.
I looked out o' th' door,
An' th' glassy green o' th' box hedges,
An' th' swingin' chains o' th' Common fence beyond,
Helped me some,
They looked so nat'ral.
Bimeby I got used to it bein' so dim in ther'
An' I could see th' steps they'd made in th' dust,
An' th' little round plop where th' malaccer cane had
set.
So I follered,
Makin' no noise
'Cause o' my bare feet.

Oh, it was a house!
Ther' was carvin's everywher',
Flowers an' vines all runnin' an' blowin',
Ther' was a whole orchard over th' chimblies,
But th' paint was all peelin' off
An' th' dust choked th' ribs o' th' pillars till they was
pretty near smooth.
Ther' was a great glass chandelier in every room
Hangin' so still.
They didn't shine much,
But they did a little,
An' that shinin' was so empty an' cold,
I had to go under 'em without lookin'.
'Twas es ef they hadn't had nothin' to reflect
Fer so many years
They was makin' up time by reflectin' me double.
Not that I seed anythin',
I jest sensed it.

Halfway up th' stairs was a great standin' glass,
A mirror, I think they call it.
It didn't show what was in front of it
Bein' all run as 'twere,
An' yet I seemed to see things movin' through it.
When I looked, they wern't ther',
An' when I didn't look, they war.
It kep' me on th' stairs a terr'ble time,
An' I had to rec'lect George Washington real hard
To git by at all.
When I got up to th' first floor,
I heer'd James Boott an' th' doctor
In a room over th' front porch,
So I crep' over an' peeked thru th' crack o' th' door.
I don't know what I seed,
Nothin' at first, I guess,
Fer th' blue light from th' blinds didn't make fer
seein',
But, Gosh! What I smelled!

Apples, boys!

Apples!

They was so sweet an' strong

I thought I'd ha' dropped with th' surprise o' it.

They did make my mouth water.

Then I heer'd th' doctor say:

"Why, Mr. Boott, what are you doing with all these apples on th' mantelpiece?"

An' old Boott's voice, like a cracked fiddle, answerin':

"I find this an excellent place to ripen apples, Dr. Busby."

"Do you mean to tell me you keep this house to ripen a few dozen apples in?"

That voice did me good,

An' I braced up an' stared into th' blue room

An' there was old James fingerin' his apples

With a queer, scared look on his face.

He was pattin' 'em,

An' cossetin' 'em,

I don't know why, but it made me shiver to see him.
He picked up a red Bald'in
An' sniffed it,
An' his eyes looked narrer an' greedy.
"I like apples," he said.
Then I give a awful jump
For th' malaccer cane fell down on th' floor with a clatter.
I guess I pushed th' door some, too,
'Cause I seem to remember standin' up ther' in th' doorway
Lookin' straight at 'em.
But they didn't see me.
The doctor started forward an' grabbed th' old man's arm.
"You poor soul!" he said.
That was all,
An' it didn't seem much,
But James Boott jest crumpled up

An' would ha' fell only fer th' doctor's holdin' him.
Somethin' seemed to claw out o' his throat.
I suppose 'twas a sob,
But it sounded like some critter inside fightin' loose.
It echoed an' echoed 'bout that room
An' set th' chandelier jiggin';
It seemed everywher',
Back an' front,
An' when I turned roun',
Ther' was somethin' wigglin' in th' big mirror, fer sartin.
I guess now 'twas th' reflection
O' th' movin' chandelier,
But I didn't think so then.
Anyhow, I jumped down them stairs
Quicker'n winkin',
An' I out into th' yard
An' run till I was in bed in my own room.
My mother thought I had a chill

But I knowed diff'rent.

I knowed a lot,

But I never found out what 'twas I really knowed.

Fer nothin' happened.

James Boott lived a couple o' years after that

An' when he died Dr. Busby bought th' house,

An' his daughter was livin' in it when I was last to Pelham.

'Twarn't much, was it?

An' yet I don't know —

I ain't never forgot it.

ONE WINTER NIGHT

"Have another cruller, Mis' Sanders.
You ain't eat nothin'."

"They're proper good, Mis' Bixby,
But Em'ly comin' down sick all of a suddin like that
Has took all th' relish out o' me.
I can't git a morsel down my throat.
My own brother's child, you know.
It ain't in th' fam'ly, Mis' Bixby.
We never had no spasms on our side.
'Course I ain't so sure 'bout her mother's people,
But I never heer'd o' nothin'.
I wish th' doctor'd come.
Waitin's awful tryin'."

"Guess he'll be right along now.
Len took his sorrel mare,
An' th' roads is beat down fine fer sleighin'."

"Do you think she really saw anythin', Mis' Bixby?"

"Laws, no! Ther' wa'n't nothin' to see."

"I dunno, o' course. I was up to my room,
Spickin' up my new bunnit fer meetin' termorrer,
When I heerd her scream.
I'm all shook up with th' sound of it;
I can't git it out o' my head.
Jest what was it happened, Mis' Bixby?
You was here, wasn't you?"

"Yes, I was here; but I wa'n't ther' — down cellar, I mean.

I heerd th' scream, too,
But 'fore I could git out o' th' rocker
She come stumblin' up th' cellar stairs
White as a dish-cloth.
'He's ther'!' she says,
'He popped right out o' a apple-barrel
An' made faces at me.'
Then down she goes on th' floor in a faint."

"Maybe 'twas one o' th' neighbors playin' tricks."

"'Deed no, Mis' Sanders.
Nobody'd durst play any such a trick on Em'ly.
Why't be murder.
She's most died o' these takin's a couple o' times."

"Th' poor child! She never give so much as a hint in her letters.
An' me her father's own sister,

An' th' only blood relation she has in th' world, too.
I do wish that doctor'd come."

"Now don't you fret.
He'll be right along.
An' Susan Ellen understands her real well.
But as to anythin' she might ha' seed,
She couldn't.
Why them barrels is chock full to th' brim,
An' shove so close ther' ain't 'nough room between 'em
for a rat to pass 'thout gnawin'.
It's jest took her ag'in, that's all.
I'm afeer'd they'll have to put her away
One o' these days."

"Has she been took often?"

"Five or six times, I guess.
Le' me see:

Ther' was th' Post Office.

She 'lowed she'd seed Si throw up a winder over th' shop.

She said he leaned out so fer he'd ha' fell

Only fer th' sill ketchin' him at th' waist

An' keepin' him danglin'.

'Twas 'nough to scare th' life out o' ye

T' hear her tell th' way he looked.

Mr. Jones was real kind.

He searched th' whole house himself.

But ther' wa'n't nobody ther'

'Cept Mrs. Jones and th' hired girl.

Then once when she was over to Stoneham,

Buyin' some 'lastic,

She went right over in a faint on th' counter,

An' when she come to,

She said 'twas Si was sellin' it to her.

'Course it wa'n't.

Why th' young man that 'tended her was right ther',

An' he didn't look no more like Si
Than I look like Drake's red bull.
He was ten years younger, fer one thing.
That's twice't I remember.
Then ther' was th' time in th' clo'es-yard,
And another in th' cars comin' from Boston.
Ther's been a good many,
First an' last.'

"Was she an' Si happy?"

"Happy as cranberries, I should say.
'Course Si was a kind o' quiet feller,
An' Em'ly's al'ays been smart and lively.
But they hit it off nicely
'Spite o' th' diff'rence in disposition."

"I s'pose ther' ain't no doubt he's dead?"

"Doubt! 'Course ther' ain't no doubt.
Why th' man was drowned.
Len was with him when't happened."

"You don't say!"

"Oh, yes! Len was ther'.
Not that he seen it happen 'xactly.
'Twas this way.
They was cuttin' ice up to Breed's pond
That Winter.
All th' boys was at it,
But that night they'd all gone home
'Cept Len an' Si.
Them two was ambitious,
An' they was sort o' racin' each other with th' cuttin',
So they kep' on by lantern light
After th' others left.

Well, bimeby it got near supper time,
An' Len figered he'd better be gettin' home.
So he hollered to Si,
An' started loadin' his things into th' sleigh.
Si didn't answer,
An' he hollered ag'in.
Then he started out over th' ice
Lookin' fer him.
Ther' was a patch o' open water
Where they'd cut th' ice clear away,
An' after Len'd been all over th' hard part
He got ther'.
Well, that water give him a turn.
'Twas jest skimmin' over ag'in
All 'cept one place,
An' he could see that wa'n't froze
'Cause th' wind ruffed it up
Jest as he got to it,
An' th' lantern light was all broke to bits

By th' waves.

Well, when Len seed that,

He give over huntin'.

He jest run fer th' sleigh

An' drove back home with his horse on th' gallop

An' scared up th' folks.

Th' whole town went out with tools an' grapples,

But 'twas all thick ice when they got to th' pond.

They couldn't find nothin'.

They searched th' woods,

But 'twan't no use.

Mr. Marvin, th' coroner

Said as how th' body would come up

When th' ice melted.

But it didn't.

Then he said it must ha' been Si's axe got caught

In th' weeds somehow an' held him down.

I forgot to tell you th' axe was gone."

"Didn't they drag the pond?"

"They tried to,
But it's awful deep.
Anyhow they never found th' body.
But ther' ain't a mite o' doubt it's ther'."

"How long after was it Len married Em'ly?"

"Oh, goin' on a year and half, I guess.
Len felt dreadful 'bout th' whole thing.
He's one o' th' sens'tive sort,
An' he kep' blamin' himself
He hadn't kep' a watch on what Si was doin'.
He felt he wanted to make it up to Em'ly some way.
So he used to go up ther' twice a day,
An' saw her firewood,
An' redd up her horses,

An' 'tend to things generally.
It made a lot o' trampin'
An' I 'spec they thought 'twould be easier if he jest
stayed for keeps,
So they got married."

"He took a good deal on himself, didn't he?"

"Well, I dunno.
Em'ly hadn't had no spells then.
Ther' didn't seem no risk."

"Good Land! Mis' Bixby.
What could ha' brought 'em on!
Our folks ain't never been subject to fits."

"No, 'deed, Mis' Sanders,
Nor Em'ly neither, fer as th' neighbors knew.
They come on all to onc't,

After she and Len'd been married a year or more."

"It's awful strange 'bout th' body not floatin'."

"Mr. Marvin said 'twas th' axe."

"But you'd ha' s'posed he'd ha' let go o' th' axe
When he felt th' water sousin' over him."

"I never thought o' that.
P'raps 'twas tied onto him somehow."

"What would he want to tie his axe on fer?
Would he ha' drove home that way?"

"Laws Sakes! I dunno.
But if 'twa'n't fastened on him,
Why didn't he float clear?"

"That was what I was thinkin'."

"Good Land o' God, Mis' Sanders!
You don't mean —"

"I don't mean nothin', Mis' Bixby.
I was jest thinkin' —
More hot water, Susan Ellen?
'Course, we'll have it in a jiffy.'

THE DAY THAT WAS THAT DAY

The wind rose, and the wind fell,
And the day that was that day
Floated under a high Heaven.

"Home! Home! Home!"
Sang a robin in a spice-bush.
"Sun on a roof-tree! Sun on a roof-tree!"
Rang thin clouds
In a chord of silver across a placid sky.

Rachel Gibbs stepped up the path
To pass the time of day
With Haywood Green's Minnie.
My, ef she ain't shut th' door!
An' all th' breeze this side th' house too.

She must like to stew.

"Minnie,

Minnie,

You ain't gone out have yer?

I'll skin my knuckles ef I knock agin.

I wonder did she lock th' door —

Well, I never!

Have you gone hard o' hearin'?

Have you —

Minnie, child, what's th' matter?

Why do you look like that?

What you doin'?

Speak I tell yer,

What you hidin' that cup fer?

God A'mighty, girl, what you doin' with wood-alcohol

In a drinkin'-cup?

Here, give it ter me,

An' I'll set it on th' table.

Set down Minnie dear,

Set right here in th' rocker
An' tell me
What ails yer to be wantin'
To drink stuff like that?
There, there, you poor lamb,
Don't look so scared.
Jest tell me all about it,
An' ease your heart.
Minnie, I'll have to shake yer
Ef you don't stop starin'
In that dretful way.
Poor Dear,
You just lay your head up agin me
An' let me soothe yer.
Poor little thing.
Poor little thing."

"Don't, don't, Rachel,
I can't bear it.

I'm a wicked woman,
But I jest couldn't stand no more."

"No more o' what?
Ain't yer Pa good to yer?
What's come over yer, Minnie?
My! I'm jest as sorry as I can be."

"Oh, it ain't nothin' like that.
An' don't be so good to me,
You'll make me want to cry agin,
An' I can't cry.
I'm all dried up,
An' it's like squeezin' my heart sick
To want to cry, an' can't."

"But what is it?
Ain't yer never goin' ter tell me?"

"Why ther' ain't nothin' to tell
'Cept that I'm tired."

"Now, look-a-here, Minnie,
No one don't drink poison jest 'cause they're tired."

"I didn't drink it, as it happens."

"No, you didn't, 'cause I come in an' stopped yer.
But I'm mighty afeered you would have.
Lord, it makes me shudder!"

"I guess yer right,
I would have.
An' I wish you'd ha' let me be.
Now it's all to do over agin,
An' I don't know as I'll git th' courage
A second time.

I guess you ain't never been right down tired, Rachel."

"Well, never to th' poison point, no, I haven't
But what's gone wrong to wear yer out so?"

"The cat's sick."

"Minnie Green, was you takin' poison
'Cause you got a sick cat?
That's down-right foolishness."

"Yes, it does sound so.
But I couldn't face nussin' her.
Look here, Rachel,
I may be foolish, or mad, or jest plain bad,
But I couldn't stan' another thing.
I'm all fretted now
An' more's one too many.
I can't go on!

Oh, God! I can't go on!

I ain't got no more'n most women,

I know that,

But I fuss a lot more.

There's al'ays th' same things

Goin' roun' like th' spokes to a cart-wheel,

Ef one ain't a-top it's another,

An' th' next comin' up all th' time.

It's breakfast, an' dinner, an' supper,

Every day.

An' th' same dishes to wash.

I hate them dishes.

I smashed a plate yesterday

'Cause I couldn't bear to see it

Settin' on th' sink waitin' fer me.

An' when I go up to make Father's bed

I git seasick

Thinkin' I'll have to see that old check spread agin.

I've settled it,

An' twitched it this way an' that,
For thirty year,
An' I hate th' sight o' th' thing.
Sometimes I've set an hour on th' stair
Ruther'n go in an' touch it.
Oh my God! Why couldn't yer let me be?
Why'd you have to come interferin'?
Why?
Why?"

"Thank th' Everlastin' Mercy I did!
But, Minnie, how long's this been goin' on?
I never had no idea anythin' was wrong."

"I don't know.
For ever an' ever, I guess.
Rachel, you can't think how hard it is fer me
To set one foot after th' other sometimes.
I hate lookin' out th' winder,

I'm so tired o' seein' th' path to th' barn.
An' I can't hardly bear
To hear father talkin' to th' horses.
He loves 'em.
But I don't love nothin'
'Cept th' cat,
An' cats is cold things to cling to,
An' now mine's sick!"

"Don't take on so, Minnie.
She'll get well.
There, you rest awhile
You can tell me afterwards."

A wind rose, and a wind fell,
And the day that was that day
Hung against a turning sun.

The robin sang "Home! Home! Home!"

In an up-and-down scale of small, bright notes.
The clouds rang silver arpeggios
Stretched across a pleasant sky.

"I wish I loved somethin', Rachel."

"Bless your heart, Child, don't you love yer Father?"

"I suppose so. But he don't mean nothin' ter me.
He don't say nothin' I want ter hear.
My ears is achin' to hear words,
Words like what's written in books,
Words that would make me all bright like a Spring day.
I lay awake nights
Thinkin' o' hearin' things,
An' seein' things.
I'm awful tired o' these hills,
They crowd in so.

Seems sometimes ef I could see th' ocean,

Or a real big city,

'Twould help.

Kind o' lay my eyes out straight fer a while,

Everythin's so short here

My eyes feels pushed in,

An' it hurts 'em.

I love laylocks,

But I git so tired o' watchin'

Th' leaves come an' th' flowers

Every year th' same,

I'd like to root 'em up.

I've set an' set in th' kitchen evenin's

Awful late,

Fer not bein' able to git up an' light th' lamp

To go ter bed.

I'm all lead somehow.

I guess ef anybody did say anythin'

I'd be deaf

Jest with listenin' so long.
I'm plumb tired out."

"Look-a-here, Minnie,
Why don't you go away
Fer a spell?"

"Me go away!
Oh, no, I couldn't never do that.
I couldn't go no place.
I can't hardly git over to Dicksville
Fer my week with Aunt Abby now.
I'm all wrong away from home.
I can't do nothin'!
Nothin' at all.
I'm so awful tired."

"Minnie, did you ever love anybody?
Any man, I mean?"

"No, Rachel, I never did.
I know that sounds queer, but it's a fact.
I've tried to think I did,
But 'twarn't true.
I hadn't hardly no time fer men-folks,
Mother was sick so long,
An' then ther' was Father.
I never was much account with 'em anyway,
But I s'pose I might ha' had one
Ef I'd fixed my mind so.
But I al'ays waited.
An' now I'm through waitin',
I'm through waitin' fer anything', Rachel.
It's jest go, go, go,
With never no end,
And nothin' done that ain't to do over agin.
Ther' now it's six o'clock,
An' I must be gittin' supper.

You needn't move that cup, Rachel.
I ain't a-goin' to touch it.
I'll jest keep on now till th' Lord takes me
An' I only hope he'll do it soon."

The robin flew down from the spice-bush
And pecked about for worms.
The clouds were brazen trumpets
Tumbled along the edge of an apple-coloured sky.
The shadow of the house
Fell across the path to the barn
Confusing it with the grass and the daisies.

A wind rose, and a wind fell,
And the day that was that day
Vanished in the darkness.

A DRACULA OF THE HILLS

YES, I can understan' ther's a sort o' pleasure collectin' old customs
An' linin' 'em up like a card o' butterflies.
Some on 'em's real quaint, I dessay,
But lookin's one thing an' livin's another.
Folks don't figger on th' quaintness o' th' things they're doin',
Ther' ain't no knick-knack about it then, I guess.
Times is changed since my young days,
Don't seem like th' same world I used to live in.
What with th' telephones an' th' automobiles,
An' city folks rampin' all over th' place Summers,
Lots o' things has kind o' faded out.
But I remember some queer goin's on;
They seem queer 'nough to me now, lookin' back.
We had good times a-plenty, nat'rally,

But they're all jumbled up together when I think on 'em,

I can't git aholt o' one more'n another,

While ther's some fearful strange things I can't never lose a mite of,

No matter how I try.

I'd like to forgit 'bout Florella Perry,

But I ain't never be'n able to.

I don't know as you'd call it a custom,

'Twarn't th' first time th' like had happened, I know,

But ther' ain't never no such doin's nowadays.

Do the Lord's ways change, I wonder?

Superstition, you call it — but I don't know.

Seein's believin' all th' world over,

An' 'twas my own father seed

An' others besides him.

I didn't, 'cause I was a young girl an' not let,

But I watched th' beginnin's;

An' what my eyes didn't see, my ears heerd,

An' that afore other folks' seein' was cold, as you might say.

'Twas all of forty year ago;

I was jest a slip of a girl drawin' toward th' beau stage but not yit ther'.

One day I'd be thinkin' o' nothin' but ribbons,

An' th' next I'd go coastin' bellybumps all afternoon with th' boys.

Florella made me a woman for fair;

P'raps that was a good thing, 'twas time for it,

But I be'n a woman long 'nough now

An' I kind o' like to look back to what went afore.

I warn't livin' here then;

My husband was a Rockridge man

An' I come here when I married.

I was raised t'other side o' Bear Mountain to Penowasset.

Father kep' th' store ther'.

They thought a heap o' him in th' town

An' I had a happy childhood.
We didn't live over th' shop,
But quite along by th' end o' th' village
In a house my mother got from her father.
We had a couple o' fields an' a wood lot
An' kep' a hired man.
Father used to drive back an' forth in a buggy morn-
in's an' evenin's,
But Mother an' me didn't miss for neighbors.
Jared Pierce owned a fine big farm just beyond us,
An' Joe Perry's was t'other side th' road.
Florella was Joe's wife,
An' a real pretty creatur she was,
Fragile as a chiney plate
An' bright an' tidy as a June pink in sunshine.
She loved flowers;
Her door-yard was like a nosegay from May till
October.
I never see sich flowers as hers;

Nobody else couldn't make 'em bloom so,
Even when she give 'em th' seeds.
Her snowdrops was al'ays first up in th' Spring,
An' it took more'n a couple o' frosts to kill her late asters.
Th' way we knew she was ill was when th' garden begun to git weedy.
She an' Joe'd be'n married 'bout seven year then,
An' My! but they'd be'n happy!
Exceptin' for not havin' a child, I don't think ther' was a thing they wanted.
An' then Florella took sick.
It come with a cough one Winter,
An' she couldn't seem to git back her stren'th.
Come plantin' time, she couldn't do it.
Joe done his best, but that year th' garden warn't nothin' perticlar.
Florella used to set in her rocker on th' piazza lookin' at it an' cryin'.

Many's th' time I've slipped over an' done a little rakin' for her.

At first she liked me to do it,

But after a while she said to let it alone;

Ef it warn't her garden, she said, she didn't care nothin' 'bout it.

She spoke almost fierce, I thought, an' I didn't go over agin for quite a spell.

When I did, Florella had took to her bed.

She was a queer kind of invalid. You couldn't seem to help her any.

She'd let you do things an' thank you,

But she al'ays seemed angry that you had to come.

One day I was dustin' her room, an' she said to me:

"Becky, I ain't a-goin' to die."

"'Course you ain't, Florella," says I,

"Whatever put that into your head?"

She flared up at that.

"'Tain't no use lyin' to me, Becky Wales, I know I'm dyin'.

But I won't die. You'll see.

I'll find some way o' livin'.

Even ef they bury me, I'll live.

You can't kill me, I ain't th' kind to kill.

I'll live! I'll live, I tell you,

Ef there's a Devil to help me do it!"

She screamed this out at me, settin' up in bed

An' p'intin' with her finger.

I was so scared I had to grab a chair to keep from fallin',

An' Joe come runnin' in from th' barn.

He took her in his arms an' soothed her,

An' she bust out cryin' an' sunk into a little heap in th' big bed

So's you couldn't hardly see her, she was so thin.

Joe sent me home. He said not to mind Florella,

That she was flighty an' didn't know what she was sayin'.

Well, after that things got worse.

Florella had spell after spell;

You could hear her cryin' an' hollerin' way down th' road.

It was al'ays th' same thing: she wouldn't die,

Nobody could make her die.

'Twas awful pitiful to hear her takin' on.

Sometimes she'd moan an' moan,

An' then she'd break out crazy mad an' angry, screamin' for life.

Joe was at his wits' end.

Dr. Smilie said ther' warn't nothin' to do for her

'Cept give her quietin' draughts.

But Florella wouldn't take 'em;

She said they was a little death,

An' she'd throw down th' cup every time they give it to her.

Then she took a notion to see Anabel Flesche.

She was a queer sort of woman, was Anabel,

She lived in a little shed of a place over Chester way.
Some said she had Indian blood in her,
Anyway she was learn'd in herbs an' semples;
She claimed to know jest when to pick 'em,
An' she talked a lot o' foolishness about th' full o' th' moon,
An' three hours before dawn, an' th' dew o' th' second Friday,
An' things like that.
Well, Florella had her in,
An' she made her camomile teas an' lotions, out o' leaves an' plants she'd gathered,
An' fussed around with bits o' wax an' string,
But Florella didn't change none.
She kep' sinkin' an' sinkin',
An' th' cryin' spells got to comin' oftener.
She cried most o' th' time then.
I used to set in th' stair winder
When I'd oughter be'n in bed, listenin'.

It made my flesh creep to hear her poor cracked voice
declarin' she wouldn't die,
An' all th' time she was dyin' plain as pikestaff.
I never see nobody so hungry for life;
She was jest starvin' for it.
Why, even when ther' warn't nothin' lef' of her but
eyes an' bones,
She'd talk an' talk 'bout th' life she'd a right to, an'
she was goin' to have, come what or nothin'!
It was kind o' lonesome out our way then;
Most o' th' passin' got to go by th' Brook Road.
'Twarn't so handy by a good two mile,
But nobody couldn't a-bear to hear Florella
Callin' an' wailin'.
You couldn't count ten th' times she was still.
'Twas a awful witchin' sound, comin' through th
night th' way it did;
I know I got all frazzled out losin' my sleep for hearin'
it.

Mother an' Mis' Pierce used to take it in turns to watch her,

An' 'twas a real kindness to do it,

It wore th' nerves so.

One Saturday afternoon Mis' Pierce was with her,

When all of a suddint she jumped out o' bed,

Cryin' she was goin' int' th' garden,

That she was well now an' wouldn't be kep' back no more.

Mis' Pierce caught her just as she was goin' through th' door

An' ther' was a struggle, I guess.

Joe heerd where he was out in th' yard hoein' beans.

He was scared to death, an' jest heaved his hoe up onto his shoulder

An' run in as he was.

Florella seed him comin' with th' hoe up on his shoulder,

An' she screamed a fearful wild scream:

"You too, Joe!" she said,

"You want to kill me same as th' others?

But you shan't do it.

I'll live to spite you,

I'll live because o' you."

She was mockin', an' grinnin', an' coughin',

An' menacin' him with her finger,

An' her head joggin' back an' forth from shoulder to shoulder like a rag-doll's.

Mis' Pierce run'd over an' tell'd Mother soon's she could git a minit,

An' them was her very words.

Now Florella loved Joe as only a rare few women do love;

But she was jest plumb crazy by this time,

Worryin' 'bout th' life was leavin' her, an' all eat up with consumption.

But it didn't make no diff'rence to Joe,

He loved her al'ays.

He jest picked her up an' laid her back in bed,
An' she went off unconscious an' never come to.
She died that night.
I mind it well, 'cause th' whippoorwills'd be'n so loud
th' night before;
When I'd heerd 'em I'd thought Florella's time was
come.
I've al'ays hated funerals,
I can't a-bear to look on a corpse
An' Florella's was dretful.
Not that she warn't pretty;
She was. Even her sickness hadn't sp'iled her beauty.
She was like herself in a glass, somehow,
An old glass where you don't see real clear.
'Twas like music to look at her,
Only for her mouth.
Ther' was a queer, awful smile 'bout her mouth.
It made her look jeery, not a bit th' way Florella used
to look.

Ef I shut my eyes I can see that face now,
Blue, an' thin, an' th' lips all twisted up an' froze so.
I guess I've seen that face in my mind every day for
forty year, more or less.
Well, they buried her, an' we girls set pansies an'
lobelia all about her grave
An' took turns tendin' 'em, week by week.
I'd loved Florella,
An', when she was dead, I rec'llected her as she was
'fore her sickness come
An' forgot th' rest.
Two years is a long time to watch a person die,
An' Joe'd done more nussin' than most husbands.
He kind o' pined when 'twas all finished,
But th' neighbors kep' a-droppin' in to see him,
An' Mother an' Mis' Pierce did him up every so often,
An' bimeby he got aholt of himself,
An' seemed to be gittin' on nicely.
He was a proper good farmer

An' things was goin' well with him,
All 'ceptin' his sorrow, which nothin' couldn't lift, nat'rally,
When th' next Winter he caught a bad cold.
I guess he let it go too far afore he saw th' doctor;
Anyhow it got a good settle on him an' he couldn't shake it off.
Nobody'd have thought much of it, I guess, but for Florella beginnin' th' same way.
Joe warn't concerned, he said he'd be all right come Spring,
But he warn't. He'd try to do his work as usual,
But soon he'd give over an' set down.
He was real patient, but he didn't git no better.
Dr. Smilie begun to look grave.
One day I went over with a bowl o' soup from Mother.
Joe was settin' in th' garden, by a bed o' portulaca;
They's cruel bright flowers, an' Joe looked so grey beside 'em

I got a start to see him.

"Becky," says he, "I know you loved Florella,

An' I should like you to have her flowers," says he.

"I've willed th' farm to my brother over to Hillsborough,

But you can dig up th' flowers afore he takes possession."

"Joe," I said, "Joe —" an' I couldn't git out another word for th' life o' me.

"Yes," he went on, "o' course I'm goin'. I've give her all I could, but it can't last.

Anabel Flesche was here yesterday, an' she told me.

I'm glad to ease her any, you know that,

But it can't last."

Glad to ease Anabel Flesche — I thought,

But I know'd he didn't mean that.

I run right home an' told Mother, an' she told Father,

An' that evenin' they druv down to Dr. Smilie's.

The doctor 'lowed 'twas consumption, but he was angry enough 'bout Anabel Flesche.

"I'll see that hussy stops her trapesin'," he said,

"Rilin' up a sick man with her witch stories," he said.

"I'll witch her, I'll run her out o' town if she comes agin."

Anabel didn't come agin, but I guess she done it th' first time,

For Joe didn't seem to take much int'rest in gittin' well.

When a man don't want to live, he don't live, an' that's gospel.

Joe went down hill so fast that by Midsummer ther' warn't no hope.

I used to set with him a good deal,

An' 'twas queer how diff'rent he was to Florella.

I think he was th' quietest man I ever see.

He didn't seem to have no pleasure 'cept in speakin' 'bout Florella.

By times he told me everythin':

How he courted her, an' what she said, an' th' way she looked when he brought her home.

I got awful near life for a young girl with th' things he told me.

I've be'n married an' widowed since, but I don't know as I ever got nearer to things than Joe's talk brought me.

Men ain't alike, an' women ain't alike, an' marriages is th' most unlike of all.

My marriage, when it come, was no more like Joe's an' Florella's

Than a piney's like a cabbage.

But this ain't my story.

"Florella had a strong will," says Joe to me one afternoon.

Autumn had come by then, an' some o' th' leaves had fell,

An' those that hung on were so bright they seemed to fairly smarten up th' sun.

Joe was layin' in his bed with a patchwork quilt over
him,
A lovely one 'twas, the State House Steps pattern;
Florella'd made it, she was wonderful clever with her
needle.
Th' whole room was a blaze o' sunshine.
Right on th' chimbley hung a picture o' Florella
Some travellin' artist had painted th' year she was
married.
I don't suppose city folk would have made much
of it,
But I thought 'twas a sweet pretty thing, an' th'
spon-image o' Florella.
"Florella had a mighty strong will," says Joe agin.
"She owned me body an' soul, an' that was a rare pride
to me."
I couldn't figger what to answer, so I didn't.
"I guess she owns me still," he says, an' I don't know
ef he was really talkin' to me.

"I'm glad she does. It's got to be both o' us, all or neither, together."

He smiled at that, very slow an' tired, almost as though it hurt his lips to do it.

"Perhaps you don't understand, little Becky," said he.

I don't know whether I did or not, an' I didn't have a chance to say,

For all of a sudden crash down come Florella's picture on th' floor with th' cord broke.

I jumped nearly out o' my skin, I expect I screamed too,

But Joe didn't so much as shiver.

"Yes," he said, lookin' at me with his steady smile,

"This proves it. You mark my words. It can't go on much longer. Poor Florella!"

He sighed then an' layed down, an' I thought he went to sleep.

I picked up th' picture, but th' glass had cut it badly,

All about th' mouth too.

It make it look th' way Florella's corpse did an' give me a turn.

I was afeerd Joe'd see it when he waked up,

So I set it with its face aginst th' wall.

But I needn't have bothered, for Joe never waked up.

When Mother come, she didn't think he looked right,

An' she sent for Dr. Smilie.

He warn't dead when th' doctor got ther',

But he was unconscious an' hardly breathin';

He stayed like that for a day an' a night

An' then 'twas all over.

All over for Joe, yes,

But not for us.

About a week after th' funeral, Father met Anabel Flesche.

"So Joe Perry's dead," whined Anabel, an' Father was sure th' old hag looked pleased.

He only said "Yes, he's dead," an' was pushin' on when Anabel stopped him.

"Florella's a determined woman," she cackled, "ain't you afeerd she'll try somebody else?"

"What th' Hell do you mean?" cried out Father.

"She loved life," said Anabel, in a queer, sly way,

"Joe's gone, but ther's others."

Father was so angry he couldn't trust himself to speak,

He jest touched up his horse an' druv on.

But what Anabel said rankled.

He an' Mother talked it over that night.

I warn't supposed to hear, but I did.

I was all shook up with th' things had happened

An' I daresn't stay in bed alone with nobody near,

So I used to creep out an' set on th' stairs

Till Father an' Mother come up.

It comforted me to know they was in th' next room,

An' I could sleep then.

Mother was real strict, an' I was al'ays sent to bed at nine;

They'd come up 'bout ten, an' I'd set that hour on th' stairs
Where I could look int' th' kitchen an' see 'em.
That's how I come to hear.
Afterwards I 'lowed I knew, an' they told me everythin'.
Well, to make a long story short,
Father an' Jared Pierce went straight to th' Selectmen,
An' told 'em what Anabel was hintin'.
Then some old people rec'llected things which had happened years ago,
An', puttin' two an' two together, they decided to see for themselves.
The Selectmen was all ther', an' Father, an' Jared Pierce;
They did it at night so's not to scare folks.
I warn't ther', but Father told it so I think I seen it:
Th' leaves blowin' an' sidlin' down,
Th' lantern light jerkin' 'long th' ground,

Th' noise o' th' pickaxes an' spades.

They got up th' coffin an' opened it.

Florella's body was all gone to dust,

Though 'twarnt' much more'n a year she'd be'n buried,

But her heart was as fresh as a livin' person's,

Father said it glittered like a garnet when they took th' lid off th' coffin.

It was so 'live, it seemed to beat almost.

Father said a light come from it so strong it made shadows

Much heavier than th' lantern shadows an' runnin' in a diff'rent direction.

Oh, they burnt it; they al'ays do in such cases,

Nobody's safe till it's burnt.

Now, sir, will you tell me how such things used to be?

They don't happen now, seemingly, but this happened.

You can see Joe's grave over to Penowasset buryin'-ground

Ef you go that way.

The church-members wouldn't let Florella's ashes be
put back in hers,

So you won't find that.

Only an open space with a maple in th' middle of it;

They planted th' tree so's no one wouldn't ever be
buried in that spot agin.

THE NOTE-BOOK IN THE GATE-LEGGED TABLE

Richardson, Erik Follows, Reed and I
Were all comparing notes on our vacations
One evening after dinner. Richardson
Had been to Labrador on a coasting steamer
And run across a half a dozen whales
In the mating season. He has an eye for colour
And picturesque detail, his flashing ocean
And his superb, preoccupied great whales
Love-hunted into fighting, was a thing
I might not have forgotten, but — you'll see,
We'd something bigger even than his whales
To occupy us later on. Tom Reed
Had climbed Mount Everest and broken his leg,
And crawled and starved for near a week before

A searching party found him. I had been
Playing the miner for socialistic reasons,
And I thought I had a pretty tale to tell
Until I heard the others. I began,
A bit puffed up to start with, then came Reed,
Then Richardson, the last was Erik Follows.
I rather think he'd needed his vacation
More than the rest of us; he worked so hard.
A doctor can work himself down to bare nerves
If he's in love with his profession, and Follows
Cared more for his than any man I know.
An alienist has many leads to follow,
But Erik's leads all seemed to follow him;
They ran him down a dozen times a day
And even tracked him into his vacations.
That's why we'd left his tale until the last,
For he was sure to have encountered something.
He had; he showed it to us. A gate-legged table
Of old mahogany, as soft as skin,

The colour of maple-syrup, with slender legs,
And just a touch of brass to liven it —
The round-ringed handle of its one small drawer.
And out of this drawer it came, the amazing thing.
A little, pigskin-bound, octavo booklet,
Ruled for accounts, but kept for notes, it seemed.
Half of the pages were blank, the rest were scrawled
With a large, oafish sort of pencil-writing,
So blurred and rubbed, it hardly could be read.
But Follows had read it; you see it was a lead.
"Well?" — we all said, for we could see at once
That Follows had a clue which stretched away
From just this note-book. "Well" — he said at last,
"I took a little trip into the Berkshires
Last Autumn in my car. One afternoon
I chanced to pass a farm-house where an auction
Was being held, and went in just for fun.
It was a pretty place. A little brook
Nuzzled its way along a boggy meadow

Behind a barn with a ship weather-vane,
Which should have struck me, but somehow it didn't,
And, just beyond, one of those odd-shaped hills
You see in Hiroshige's prints ran up,
A slope of hemlocks, right into the sky.
The house was low and wide, with both its porches
So thickly covered with Virginia creeper
The lattice laths might have been creeper-stems.
The crimson of the leaves in the Autumn sunlight
Against the old white paint was strangely cheerful.
I liked the place at once; it seemed a shame
To scatter all the queer, comfortable old things
Had been there for so long. I stopped to look
A moment at the crowd, trampling the garden
And shuffling through the house, then I went in
And bought that table in a sort of pity
That all these things spread round were up for sale.
The old stock ended — it was the usual story —
Gone West, or dead, no one to keep the farm.

I bought the table, ordered it expressed,
Pondered the natural queries which an auction
Always arouses for a day or so,
And finished out my trip without adventure.
Without adventure, yes, that was to come.
It must have been at least two weeks before
I found a moment to unbox my table.
I set it up, dusted it, opened the leaves,
And in the drawer I found this diary;
For that is what it is, a diary.
There is no date, but I can tell you now
The notes were made in eighteen eighty-nine.
But I don't know who wrote them. There's no name;
And that, I think, I never shall discover.
The diary begins — I'll read it to you,
Just a few pages, and then tell the rest."
He picked the book up from the table and read
Slowly and quietly, yet it rang my nerves
It was so still and horrible.

"My God!
Why have they sent me up here to the grass?
Sent me to live among the hateful grass!
The terrible, creeping, creeping, pitiless grass!
What is this thing, this gorging, endless thing,
Moving so slowly that it baffles sight,
But never stopping either night or day?
We mow it down, and in a week again
It covers all the place we have laid bare.
Man builds his roads through grass. With breaking toil,
With sweat and muscle-ache he forces his way
Across the earth. He shears the grasses down
And keeps them there with infinite stress of wheels,
But if he pauses in his travelling,
If for a space he rests, worn with fatigue,
The ravening grass has run across his paths
And choked them utterly away. Oh, God!

The chatter, chatter, chatter, of the grass!
I hear it in the night crying for men
To feed its vitals with their own. I see
It crawling toward this thin, unstable house,
Thrusting its clutching fingers through the boards,
Swallowing the poor weak flowers in their beds.
What is this house? A flimsy, man-made thing
Besieged on all sides by the gluttonous grass.
They speak of spears of grass, but I see bellies
Bellies which feed on man-blood; feet which suck
Entrails of human beings. I am mad,
Tortured to see this island of a house
Waiting to be engulfed. And they have sent
Me here for rest! Oh, Fools! Fools! I, alone —
The myraids of grass are more than I.
I cannot eat, for I will feed no grass.
I cannot sleep for listening to it drink
And fortify its waiting strength with dew.
They tell me to go sit upon the hill

Under the hemlocks where no grass can grow.
But do not trees themselves flourish on graves?
They laugh, the farmer and his sons, they do not think
Of the fat, waving grass that I have seen
In the churchyard. I often go to watch
How green, how wicked green, it grows just there.

* * * * *

Last night I heard a little quiet noise,
A wood-pecker noise, but very, very soft,
And it was in the middle of the night.
I listened for hours till the grey light came,
And then it stopped, and then at last I slept."

* * * * *

The doctor paused, but not one of us spoke.
He turned some pages over and went on:
"I hear it now on almost every night
And all day long my head aches. Lack of sleep,
I know. And that is very bad, for when

I do not sleep, my hearing is so sharp
I very nearly catch the words they say
The grasses. Only not quite, not quite; and this
Hearing and not is piercing my head through,
Burning it up with irons, hot and cold,
So that I break out in a chilly sweat.
The farmer's wife tells me I'm looking badly,
Should go out more. But that I will not do.
I never go out now. The grass is there.
I have no money; the town doctors saw
To that. 'No care at all,' they said, 'just grow
As the grass grows.' I laughed, oh, I did laugh!
And still they sent me here to rest. My ears!
My ears! They hurt with all the noise. The tapping
Is louder every night. It seems as though
It tried to drown the whimper of the grass,
But nothing can do that. And I can't go
Away, I have no money, not a cent.
I cannot walk, for I must walk through grass.

I've whittled bits of wood to stop my ears,
But, with them in, I think I hear the leaves
Of some dead tree stuttering out my name
In a ghoulish whisper. So I take them out.
The tapping is better, even the stealthy, licking
Murmur which comes from all that tide of grass.

* * * * *

I've found it out at last. I made them tell me.
I threatened them one evening with a knife,
And said I'd go to bed like a good boy
When once they'd told. It seems that, years ago,
Fifty years or a hundred, I don't remember,
An old sea-captain came up here to live.
He'd left the sea, and as his daughter was married
To the man who owned this place, they took him home
To die, whenever that might happen. But he
Was marvellously afraid of just this dying,
Because he felt like me about the grass.

He used to swear that it should never get him,
And begged his daughter to cast him in the sea.
But she, a decent, quiet woman, was shocked,
And he could never make her give her promise.
At length he hit upon a compromise
And made the two of them agree to it.
His coffin was to be slung from a high beam
Beneath the roof-peak of the barn, and left
To rot and crumble. When they'd given their words,
He had that vane I've often wondered at
Set up there on the barn, he liked to watch
The wind-flaws veer it round and round, he said,
And they were satisfied and never thought
Beyond his reason. But I know more than they.
I know he set it for a sign, a symbol,
A monument. He died at last quite happy
Believing he had overcome the grass.
Way up under the roof-peak swung the coffin,
And mostly folk forgot that it was there.

It gathered dust and cobwebs and grew dim,
You couldn't rightly see it when you looked,
For all the chaff and hayseed floating round
Made a kind of blur to any one below.
But, one day, many years after that time,
The farmer's son, going to feed the horses,
Heard a loud, intermittent sort of banging
Under the roof, and when he took the ladder
And climbed up there to see, he found a strap
Had given way, and the coffin hung head down
Suspended by the other, and there it teetered
To and fro with every gust of wind
When the barn-door was open. So he said
He'd fix it in the morning. But that night
He woke to hear a rap-tap-tapping, so like
A hammer — but that was a foolish thought,
He knew directly what the thing must be,
Some stanchion broken loose in the high wind.
It was a stormy night, so he decided

He'd leave the shutter, or whatever it was,
Until next day, and fell asleep again.
But in the morning, when he went to see
About the coffin, it was all nailed up
As firm as could be with a harness-strap.
They thought that very odd, they little knew
What men can do who have the fear of grass,
What fear can make men do although they're dead.
But I have found a hero I can worship.
Napoleon, Julius Cæsar, what are these?
They never ruled the grass, it sucked them up
And drank their brains, and overscored their towns.
O rare and mighty Captain, here's my hand.
Mightier than all men have been before!
Dominant Master, even over grass!
Not by the accident of death at sea,
But by compelling force in your own soul
To be forever above these miles of grass,
As no one ever in the world has been.

I feel a leaping fervour to join my hand
With yours, to grasp your bony, brittle fingers
Unstained by grass-roots. To-morrow I will go
And offer sacrifices to your manes.
How soaring my thoughts are released at last
From all the demon grasses that have gnawed
At them these months past! Now I go to bed,
And I shall sleep to-night.

* * * * *

Oh, merciless God! The coffin is not there!
They tell me it crumbled many years ago,
And where the bones are no one knows. A jelly-fish
With oozing, pulpy brain, a worthless polype
Tossed in the air by a Devil-God for fun,
That's what I am, and have been, ever to think
One could cheat grass! The squirming, oily grass!
It waited, lapping round and round the walls
Of the old barn to catch him as he fell.
The terrible, blind grass, feeling its way

With little patting hands. Feeling its way
Slowly, horribly, over all mankind.
There is no safety anywhere at all
For any people. The clapboards of this house
Will peel off one by one, the floor will crack
And through the cracks will come the grinning grass.
My legs will find it stifling them in nets,
My open hands be shut with thongs of grass,
My mouth will hold its roots, my nose its heads,
And in my ears the clatter of its laughter
Will burst my brain and cleave my senseless skull.
I cannot wait and watch, the strain is fire
Stretching and shrivelling me till my bones twist
And drive their needle ends out through my flesh,
And all I see is blood struck through with green,
The bloated green of over-nourished grass.
You dastard God, who set this hideous thing
Upon us! Curse you! Curse you! And all this
Foul, beastly, eating Earth. You shall not have me,

I'll die before I'm eaten. I'll squeeze my hands
About my neck until my eyes spit out
And after them the blood which is my life.
I cannot do it, my fingers are too thin.
But I will find a way to strengthen them,
I'll think of nothing but how to find a way,
I'll kill myself with thinking — "

Follows stopped,

And closed the book. "That entry is the last,"
He said, quite simply, "but there's more to tell.
For I went back to Oakfield — that was the nearest
Village to the farm — and found a man
Who'd known the Crawfords in the eighteen eighties.
And when I asked him if they'd had a boarder,
He said, 'Oh, yes, a poor demented fellow,
Sent up there for the quiet of the country.'
He'd been there just about three months, he told me,
And then, one day when no one was about,
He'd hanged himself by an old harness-strap

To one of the barn beams. He said no more.
Perhaps he did not know about the coffin,
And clearly he knew nothing of the man.
I think I've learned a salutary lesson.
I might myself have been one of those doctors
Prescribing easily 'Rest in the country.'
But, all the same, I wish I'd had a chance
To try my hand. And even as I say it,
I realize what harpies science makes us.
I pity him profoundly — yet a case
Like his to perish on a harness-strap!
Good Lord, what brutes we are! And now let's talk
Of something cheerful. Richardson, your whales — "

THE ROSEBUD WALL-PAPER

So you been peekin' int' th' winders o' th' old porch
house to th' Four Corners,
Have ye?
Wall, I dunno as anybody wouldn't be puzzled
Not knowin' nothin' 'bout it, an' seein' it th' way 'tis.
I bet you had a time pushin' through them cat-briers
That's growed up all about it.
Terrible stiff bushes they be, an' th' scratchiest things
goin'.
Oh, you needn't tell me!
Many's th' first-class tear I've got from 'em in my time.
Not those pertic'ler ones, I ain't no call to go shovin'
through them,
An' what on earth you wanted to tackle 'em for beats
me.

But, since you been ther',
It's just nater you should want to know.
A house all sagged down an' rotted, an' th' chimbley fell,
An' every room spick an' span with new wall-paper!
Sort o' creepy, was it?
I guess th' creeps is ther' all right,
But we figgered we'd smothered 'em with that rosebud paper.
Mrs. Pearson, th' doctor's wife, had th' choosin' of it.
She went to Boston a-purpose when th' town decided to put it on.
I al'ays thought 'twas kind o' gay for what they wanted it for,
But Mrs. Pearson said it had ought to be gay
An' she's a real tasty woman;
Nobody darsn't go agin her judgment in this town,
Least of all th' selectmen with th' doctor chairman o' th' board.

Well, Mr. Day, ther's a good long story to that wall-paper.

Th' beginnin's way back, all of thirty year, I guess.

Ther' was a storekeeper here at that time, name o' Amos Sears.

He warn't a native o' th' place,

I've heerd he come from somewheres down Cape Cod way,

He just sort o' drifted here an' stuck.

His wife was dead, an' he had a son, young Amos,

Who used to play around with us boys.

You know what boys be, al'ays in an' out o' one another's pockets.

Young Amos was a fine, upstandin' chap.

We all favoured him, but he an' Luke Bartlett was like a plum an' its skin,

You couldn't peel 'em apart.

They beat th' band for mischief an' high jinks,

Th' rest of us just follered along an' caught th' lickin's.

'Bout th' time we was gittin' through school, old Amos died.

We thought, o' course, young Amos'd settle right down to th' shop,

But he wouldn't hear to it, said he couldn't rest quiet without he'd done a bit o' trapesin'

Afore he took root for keeps;

An' first thing we knew, he'd hired Tom Wetherbee to look after th' business

An' was off.

He wanted Luke should go with him,

But Luke was a real steady youngster, he'd 'prenticed himself to a stone-mason

An' wouldn't budge.

I guess now he wishes some he'd gone,

But I dunno, 'tain't easy seein' into other folks' minds.

I went studyin' surveyin' to Barre

An' warn't here when Amos left.
Luke heerd from him two or three times,
But pretty soon th' letters stopped.
Tom Wetherbee went on 'tendin' to th' shop
An' payin' his own wages out o' th' earnin's.
What he didn't need for repairin' an' to keep th' stock up, he put in th' bank for Amos,
But Amos never drawed any of it,
So it just piled up.
What Amos lived on, I dunno, he never told nobody to my knowledge.
But he lived somehow, an' after ten years
He come back with a wife.
Mrs. Amos was a fine figger of a woman,
With eyes like steel traps, an' a tongue like a mowin' machine.
She al'ays reminded me of a sumach when it's turned in th' Autumn,
Sort o' harsh an' bright. You couldn't see nothin' else

When she was around, but she warn't th' easy kind,
Her nerves was like a bundle o' fire-crackers,
An' it didn't take no slow-match to light 'em.
She could do anythin' she set her hand to,
But she made such a touse doin' it
You'd full as lives not have it done.
Amos found quite a bit o' money waitin' for him in th' Wiltshire bank,
An' he found th' store in extra good shape,
So th' first thing he done was to buy a house.
Not th' one you see, that didn't come till later,
Th' third house from th' post-office was his.
Then he took Tom Wetherbee into partnership
An' moved into his new house, an' things begun.
They begun with a vengeance, but we didn't know nothin' for some time.
Th' house, maybe you noticed, stands quite a piece above th' road.

Did you see anythin' queer 'bout th' grass either side
th' steps?
Well, that was 'cause Amos an' Mrs. couldn't come
to no agreement 'bout fixin' up th' lawn.
He set by a straight slope an' she wanted terraces,
So they had a straight slope to one side an' terraces
to th' other.
Amos made a joke of it, but Mrs. Amos she made a
grievance;
She made most everythin' a grievance.
She was al'ays runnin' roun' an' tattlin' aginst
Amos.
I expect she had one o' them tongues they say's hung
in th' middle;
If one end got tired, all she had to do was let it be
an' go right along with th' other.
When she warn't scoldin' Amos, she was scoldin' 'bout
him.
But in th' end 'twarn't him as give, 'twas her.

She up an' runned away, boarded th' afternoon train to Boston

One day while he was mindin' th' shop.

When Amos found out she'd gone

He got Bill Rivers (Rivers kep' th' livery stable then) to hitch up his Morgan mare in a couple o' shakes

An' drive him over to th' junction, lickety split, to ketch th' night train from Fitchburg.

He ketched it all right, but 'twas nip an' tuck,

Th' conductor was hollerin' "All aboard!" when they come in sight o' th' depot.

I mind Rivers was some put out 'cause Amos didn't say a single word

All th' way over,

Didn't even think to thank him when he got him ther'.

Amos was back in a little over a week,

But he didn't bring Mrs. Amos with him.

Luke went up to see him right away,
An' he told Luke Mrs. Amos had gone for a stewardess
on a Halifax steamboat.
She had th' sea in her blood, he said,
An' he guessed she couldn't be happy livin' so far
from it.
It seems she was a New Bedford woman,
An' all her folks had been whalers.
Everybody supposed as how Amos would sell his house
an' shop
An' go an' settle somewheres his wife would like.
But he didn't do no such thing.
He just hung on, lookin' as gloomy as a rainy Fourth
o' July;
An' he kep' a-hangin', neither here nor ther' exactly,
He didn't seem fixed to stay, an' he didn't go.
Things went on like that for more'n a year,
An' then Amos bought that parcel o' land to th' Four
Corners, an' put up th' house you see.

When 'twas finished, he sold th' old house an' moved in.

He druv into town every day to th' store,

But folks didn't go out to see him.

He'd turned terr'ble glum an' pernickety

An' Luke was th' only man on real terms with him.

You couldn't git anythin' out o' Luke,

He was mum as a fish,

That's how we didn't come to hear 'bout Mrs. Richards bein' with Amos

Till she'd been ther' quite a spell.

I dunno's we'd ever have heerd but for Bill Rivers drivin' some Summer boarders

Up Hog Back one August afternoon.

One o' th' ladies had a faintin' fit or somethin',

An' Rivers stopped to Amos's to ask if she couldn't rest ther' while th' others went on.

He was took all aback when Mrs. Richards come out.

Rivers was a awful talker,

He'd twist a bit o' news under his tongue same as if
'twas a chaw o' tobaccer
An' I never see a man take such relish in spreadin'
it.
So th' whole town knowed 'bout Mrs. Richards 'fore
he'd been back an hour.
You know how folks be, once git a story started
An' it's off rampagin' like a forest fire.
Somebody said Luke'd know, an' two or three went
up to Luke's
An' asked him.
But Luke just said "Why not? Amos had to have
some one to do for him,
An' Mrs. Richards was a respectable widow from
Millbridge."
Ther' warn't no gainsayin' that, when Luke pointed it
out,
But what folks don't say ain't al'ays a handle to what
they thinks.

Luke was a real smart man, an' he wouldn't listen to a word aginst her an' Amos,

An' nobody darsn't say a thing to Amos himself nat'rally.

So it went on. Amos had a hired housekeeper, said Luke;

Amos had somethin' he shouldn't have had, said others.

But that was only hearsay, an' Mrs. Richards' husband had been th' postmaster to Millbridge for years

Until he'd been took off by th' pneumony three years before,

An' left nothin'.

"So his widow had to work," said Luke's friends.

Amos's friends didn't say nothin' seein' he didn't rightly have any,

Barrin' Luke, but that was enough.

Luke was a powerful perseverin' man, an' wouldn't stand no nonsense.

But, spite o' Luke, ther' was talk, heaps of it.
You can't keep women from enjoyin' a story like
that,
Nor men neither, I guess.
A good few o' th' boys went out to Amos's
An' they telled how cozy 'twas out ther',
With white curtings to th' winders
An' th' chiny on th' dresser all set out elegant,
Nothin' out o' place an' a sort o' cheery look to every-
thin'.
Amos had planted apple-trees an' they was just come
to bear.
Early sugar apples they was, you know th' kind,
Yaller streaked with red an' sweet as honey.
To hear th' talk you'd think no one else in th' town
Had apples. Boys will be boys, even when they ain't,
An' ther' was somethin' 'bout Mrs. Richards menfolk
couldn't have enough of.
But Amos didn't turn a hair, he know'd his woman.

'Twas al'ays th' same — apples, an' cookies, an' blackberry jam, an' a welcome.

Amos warn't like th' same man he was to th' store,

He'd laugh an' joke, for all th' world like he used to do in th' old days,

'Twas good to hear him.

Th' women didn't go, though I guess they was itchin' to,

But none on 'em darst begin.

Women is sticklers for custom,

An' all that whisperin' made a sort o' fence

They couldn't break through.

I've sometimes wondered if that ain't th' real use o' women,

To keep things goin' on even an' straight, with no bumps an' jumps to onsettle ye.

O' course ther's th' other kind o' women, th' Mrs. Amos kind,

But, praise th' Lord, I ain't had much to do with them.

But, however stiddy they be, women is terr'ble cur'ous critters,
They can't git along without a deal o' worritin' 'bout th' neighbours' concerns.
An' I do believe our Parson's wife was th' most cur'ous woman ever was.
She was at th' Parson from mornin' till night to go out to Amos's.
You see she wanted to know how things was at first hand,
But she know'd better'n to say so.
What she said was that his duty called him to go an' see if Amos was a errin' man;
If he kep' a scarlet woman to th' Corners, th' Parson ought to try an' git him away from her
An' save his soul.
'Twas a bitter strong argiment to use to a Parson,
An' she used it every day an' all day.
'Twas clear he wouldn't git no peace till he went,

An' Parson Eldridge loved peace.
He was a meek little man
An' didn't hold with pokin' in wher' 'twarn't agreeable,
But he had to go, an' he did.
Mrs. Eldridge must have been mortal disappointed,
For all he said when he come back was
That Amos didn't appear to be livin' in sin.
He didn't say he warn't, mind you,
But he 'lowed to his wife he couldn't see no openin' to
start savin' his soul.
"Th' Almighty works in his own ways," he said,
"An' Amos has had a heavy cross to bear."
He didn't name no names, but it set us all to thinkin' o'
Mrs. Amos
An' what a dance she'd led Amos.
It made us feel sorry for him,
An' after that we kind o' sidelooked his failin'
If so be as 'twas one,
An' th' tittle tattle an' speculatin' died down.

Also we was gittin' used to things, I guess.
Well, they kep' that way for a good fifteen year
An' then one night Amos called th' doctor on th' telephone.
His voice was gritty an' shakin', so th' doctor said afterwards,
An' he know'd at once somethin' had happened.
Mrs. Richards was real bad, Amos said,
Could th' doctor come right away.
So Dr. Pearson got out his flivver an' started for th' Corners.
'Twas just commencin' to snow, but 'twarn't so deep th' car couldn't run,
Nor it warn't so light it didn't matter.
'Twas one o' them stingin' snow-storms,
With th' flakes so little you can't hardly see 'em
But drivin' with a awful force.
That kind o' snow don't seem to lay none at first,
But ther' ain't no melt to it, an' it goes on an' on,

Comin' every way to oncet, an' blowin' up into drifts
which you can't make out wher' they be or
ain't till you're on 'em.
One side th' road'll be swep' clear,
An' th' other all piled up with snow higher'n your
head,
An' all th' time you're as good as blind
'Count o' th' flakes bein' so sharp an' sheddin' down
so almighty fast.
Some men wouldn't have gone out,
Dr. Blake to Millbridge wouldn't, I know,
But Dr. Pearson went wher' he was needed;
Battle an' murder an' suddin death couldn't stop him
if any one was sick.
It took him all of an hour to git to th' Corners,
An' he know'd when he got ther' he couldn't git back.
Amos met him at th' door,
"I mistake but you're too late, Doctor," says he.
And so 'twas. Mrs. Richards was dead.

She'd had a heart attack, and died while th' doctor was
on his way.
Th' doctor done what he could just to comfort Amos
by doin' somethin',
But in th' end he had to tell him 'twas all over.
Then th' doctor was scared, Amos acted so queer.
He turned as white as marble, an' as stiff.
He stood ther', lookin' down at th' bed,
Lookin' with his eyes like stones o' fire,
Froze an' burnin' at th' same time.
He never moved 'em from th' dead face,
Just stared still as ice, as if he was all shelled in it,
But somethin' hot an' hard was scaldin' him inside.
Th' doctor tried to rouse him, but he didn't seem to
hear.
Then th' doctor took his hand an' raised it up,
But when he let it go, it fell down by his side agin,
An' Amos didn't seem to notice that he'd took it an'
dropped it.

Dr. Pearson couldn't leave him ther' alone,
An' he couldn't go anyway 'cause o' th' storm.
Th' snow kep' risin' higher an' higher on th' winders.
Th' door was clean blocked, an' when mornin' come
Th' doctor couldn't see his car, 'twas all buried in.
All night long Amos had stood just th' same way
Starin' at th' dead woman.
He might have been dead himself, or a moniment.
He didn't give a sign he was livin',
Only ther' was mist on a hand-glass th' doctor held to his mouth.
Th' doctor tried to force some coffee down his throat,
But his jaw was clinched an' he couldn't prize it open.
He tried to throw him over so's he could git him layin' down,
But he couldn't budge him no more'n if he'd been a granite boulder.
Seem's he had th' stren'th o' ten men

Just to keep standin' ther' lookin' at that dead body.
'Twas a Sunday night Amos called th' doctor,
An' 'twas Wednesday mornin' afore th' storm broke.
An' all that time Amos had stood ther' without movin' a muscle,
Only he'd sort o' shrunk together; not stoopin', I don't mean,
But collapsin' in sideways.
Th' doctor put it he looked brittle
Like you might snap him in two but couldn't overset him nohow.
Maybe 'twas th' sunlight done it. The sun shone straight in his eyes,
But he never even winked 'em, just kep' on lookin' an' lookin'.
'Bout 'leven o'clock a sleigh come for th' doctor.
They'd been tryin' to git to him for two days
But couldn't, th' drifts was so high,
They'd had to shovel most o' th' way as 'twas.

When th' doctor let 'em in ('twas th' two Fowler boys
an' Sam Gould)
Th' first thing he told 'em was to come upstairs an'
help him with Amos.
But they hadn't hardly set foot in th' room
When Amos tumbled over on th' floor — same as a
tree, they said,
Stiff from head to foot, not limp like a man in a faint.
Th' boys picked him up an' laid him on th' bed in th'
next room,
An' th' doctor worked over him; but 'twas hours 'fore
he give a sign o' life,
An' when he did, he went right out of his head with
fever.
He warn't sensible for some days, an' by that time th'
funeral was over an' done with.
They telled him how 'twas when they thought he
could stand it,
But he didn't seem to care,

I guess he'd buried her in his mind long before,
Durin' th' storm.
Folks was awful sorry for Amos,
But he didn't act to take much stock in that neither.
He got up an' went about,
But he didn't go to th' store no more,
An' he didn't take no steps to git a new housekeeper.
Mrs. Eldridge had a string o' middle-aged women to
suggest for th' place,
But th' Parson kep' her off him somehow.
I al'ays had a likin' for th' Parson after that;
Maybe he'd sensed more'n we thought, all along.
He was a good man, too good to go interferin' with th'
Almighty's doin's,
An' that's what you can't say o' most parsons.
Come Spring, one afternoon when Luke Bartlett was
workin' in his yard,
Tinkerin' at a funeral urn for Elder Townsend's
moniment,

Who should come creepin' in but Amos Sears.

Luke was all took aback seein' him comin' in so quiet,

Almost stealin' in, you might say,

'Cause Amos had shown him pretty plain that he didn't set nothin' by seein' him.

Luke was a sensitive man, an' Amos turnin' from him had hurt him dretful.

Amos crep' up to him, peerin' as if he couldn't see very well,

An' hangin' onto his stick like 'twas a third leg he couldn't do without.

"Luke," says he, "Luke, we been old friends, you an' me."

"We have, Amos," says Luke.

"Luke," says Amos agin, "I've had a sight to bear in my life."

"You have, Amos," says Luke.

"'Tis you, Luke, an' you only can ease me now, if you will," says Amos, an' ther' was tears in his eyes.

Luke seen 'em an' they made him feel sick all over,
Amos warn't one to cry.
Now what do you s'pose it was he wanted Luke should do?
Why, make a gravestone for Mrs. Richards, an' that was all ther' was to it.
Everythin' went slick as paint till they come to th' inscription;
Amos had that all writ out nice on a piece of paper
An' he read it to Luke.
"Here lies th' body o' Mary Richards,
Beloved friend an' onlawful wife o' Amos Sears,
For seventeen years his sole comfort by th' grace o' God.
Blessed be th' name of th' Lord whose ways are inscrutable.
Erected by her bereaved husband in th' sight o' Heaven wher' ther's no marriage nor givin' in marriage,

But joyful meetin' without end for ever an' ever.
Amen."

Luke took th' paper when Amos handed it to him,
But he couldn't git aholt o' no words quick enough to
speak 'em.

Maybe he'd know'd al'ays, same as Parson Eldridge,
Maybe he'd thought what he said he did.
But anyways you look at it that inscription was a
baffler.

Here was Amos givin' himself away to th' whole town.
He put it to him so, but Amos said he wouldn't keep it
hid no more,

That 'twas like th' burnin' bush to him,
Th' love they'd bore each other.
Then Luke argid 'twas sacrilege to ask th' blessin' o'
th' Lord for a onsanctified union.

"Who says 'twarn't sanctified," shouted Amos,
"She was th' Lord's givin' to lighten th' sorrow He'd
set so heavy on me.

God's just, as I've heerd from th' pulpit many a time,
An' I don't cal'ate you're denyin' it,
An' He done th' square thing by me.
I'd be a limpin' coward if I didn't proclaim it to all an' sundry,
Witness as I be to His mercy an' comprehendin' kindness."
That was too much for Luke. He was a Godfearin' man,
An' he thought Amos had gone blasphemin' crazy.
But Amos hadn't, not then.
They went at it, hammer an' tongs,
Each talkin' nineteen to th' dozen.
Then th' pity of it come over Luke,
An' he said he'd try to see it Amos's way
An' tell him in a month when th' stone'd be near done.
An' Amos had to do with that for th' time bein'.

Luke made th' gravestone just as Amos said,
Of good black slate, with th' top poked up in a little round just big enough for a angel's head,
An' th' wings reachin' out right an' left underneath —
Luke had a won'erful knack with angels, he put on most all his stones —
But when it come to th' inscription, he couldn't stomach it.
So he just put "Here lies Mary Richards. God's will be done."
He'd worked it out that them words'd fit most anythin' an' they wouldn't shock nobody.
If Amos was right 'bout th' Almighty's designin's, they'd mean that,
An' if he warn't, they'd mean otherwise. They'd come in handy either way.
Then he went an' set it up himself,
I guess he was kind o' afeared Amos might break it or somethin'.

Well, th' month was up by then, an' he had to give his answer to Amos.

I dessay he didn't look forward to it any,

But Luke warn't th' man to shirk a duty,

An' that very evenin', soon's supper was over, he started for th' Corners.

Luke never telled what happened that night, but I know for a fact that him an' Amos never spoke agin.

Ther' warn't much time for speakin', as a matter o' fact,

For 'twas th' next Tuesday I went up to th' graveyard.

I don't mind now why, I hadn't buried none o' my folks for years,

But I did go up, an' wandered round for a spell,

An' all of a suddin I come on Mrs. Richards' grave.

I didn't know nothin' 'bout th' inscription,

Luke didn't say anythin' 'bout it till 'twas all over,

So 'twarn't that made me look at th' stone.
Then I couldn't scarcely b'lieve my eyes,
Th' stone was all writ over with red letters.
First I thought they was blood,
But then I see they was red chalk runnin' straight between th' lines Luke had cut.
Yes, Sir, you've guessed it. 'Twas Amos's inscription,
Fixed so's to read right along with Luke's;
An' Luke's letters was chalked too, it looked all of a piece a little ways off.
Thinks I, th' man who could do that must be goin' through blazes,
His grievin' must have plumb crazed him,
I guess 'twould be a Christian act to go an' see how he be.
I warn't anxious for goin', but I didn't see how any decent man
Could leave them letters an' just go off home.
I'll never forgit that drive to th' Corners, never.

Every tree I passed looked so's I'd never seen it till
that minit,
They stuck out at me an' made me notice 'em,
I can almost tell you how many leaves ther' was to
every branch.
An' ther' was th' Ford chuggin' away,
An' th' thrushes singin' their sunset songs,
An' th' sun goin' down behind Hog Back.
My! How black th' mountain was with th' sky turnin'
all kinds o' colours behind it,
An' th' air comin' cool an' damp when we struck th'
shadow o' th' mountain!
'Twas all shadow to Amos's, but back yonder t'other
side o' th' valley was full o' sun,
It holds a good hour longer down ther'.
I jumped out o' th' car an' knocked on th' door,
But nobody answered.
Then I done th' same as you did, I peeked int' th'
winders.

But I couldn't see if Amos was inside or not.

In th' end I just made bold an' opened th' door.

Red chalk, did I say?

Red, an' white, an' green, an' blue, an' purple chalk!

'Twas chalk, chalk, all roun' th' room!

An' 'twas ships done with chalk!

Ther' was a steamboat fightin' waves as tall as th' funnels,

Roarin' over her they was, with a noise like artil'ry,

I swear I heerd 'em, an' I sensed she'd be swamped in a minit.

'Twas a rackin' thing to watch her strugglin' to keep up

With no more chance than a fly under a pump-spout.

An' another steamboat (they was all steamboats) runnin' on rocks, black rocks, with red an' green waves dashin' th' ship onto 'em.

Th' next was th' ship goin' to pieces,

An' th' waves was all full o' people clingin' to bits of wood.

Some was hangin' on a little longer, some was drownin' as you looked.

I can't describe how awful 'twas.

One ship was afire, with great tongues o' yaller flame bustin' through black smoke.

Not another vessel was near, just th' heavin' sea wallowin' in th' glitter o' th' flames.

Ther' was a steamer struck by a bolt o' lightnin',

Riv' clear down th' middle, an' th' crew was takin' to th' life-boats,

An' th' life-boats was over-loaded an' sinkin' as fast as they was launched.

I was cold all over with lookin' 'fore I come to th' last,

An' that was th' worst of all.

'Twas a dismasted hulk driftin' with th' run o' th' waves,

Only ther' warn't no waves, th' ocean was calm,

So calm it made you want to scream.
Dawn was comin', an' th' light was just showin' that
ther' was a ocean at all,
But 'twarn't no good to see it for ther' warn't nothin'
to see but it.
'Twas done pretty big, an' you could make out ther'
was somebody on th' ship,
An' that 'twas a woman.
Somehow you know'd she was all th' folks ther' was,
An' th' hulk had drifted out o' th' way o' other
ships,
An' that 'twas just goin' to float along like that with
th' woman on it
Till th' food give out an' she died o' starvation.
By that time I was in a sweat all over.
There was a lonesomeness an' a downright nastiness
'bout them picters
I can't describe to ye,
But you'd have felt it too, if you'd seen 'em.

I'm glad you didn't, I wouldn't wish any one to be
haunted by 'em same as I been.
I'd just finished an' was startin' all over agin 'cause I
couldn't keep from it,
When Amos come in.
"You didn't know I could do nothin' like that, did
you?" says Amos,
Beginnin' in th' middle, with not so much as a "How
d'you do" to set things goin'.
"No," says I, "I didn't. Be these your doin'?"
"They be," says he. "I'm pretty smart at drawin'
now.
I guess ther's more in a man than he knows till he
tries."
I didn't answer, not findin' what to say,
But he didn't notice that.
"I been at it all Winter," he says,
"Quick as I worked out a new way for th' sea to kill
I slapped it down on th' wall yonder.

I guess I ain't left out a single one; if I learn I have, I'll put it on th' ceilin'.

Curse that woman! One on 'em must strike!

Th' sea's so notional at killin' 'twon't leave her be much longer,

Stan's to reason she's nearin' her term.

Eighteen year she's been at it, temptin' it an' floutin' it

Same's she's flouted me.

Th' sea won't desert me th' way Luke done,

Th' sea'll be my friend.

Ain't I prayed to it every night an' mornin'

To git her quick.

I shall go mad 'fore long if somethin' don't happen.

Joshua" — an' he grabbed my arm — "you think it'll git her pretty soon, don't ye?"

I was scared, Mr. Day, scared to hear him sayin' such things.

He was tremblin' from head to foot, an' his eyes had a mean, dry look in 'em

I'd never see in nobody's.

"Amos," I says, "be you speakin' o' your wife?"

"You tarnation fool!" says he, droppin' my arm an' ragin' off roun' th' room,

"Of course I be. If I warn't a God damn coward, I'd kill her with my own hands.

But th' sea's my depity; I've appointed it in my place, an' I'm just waitin' for news.

An' I'll wait till Hog Back's a valley, an' don't you go doubtin' it."

I didn't doubt, I was beginnin' to know Amos,

But what he said riled me so, I couldn't keep from hollerin' out:

"God in Heaven, man, don't you know she was drownded in a wreck two year ago!"

'Twarn't right to tell him like that, an' I was ashamed to th' marrer at what I'd done th' minit after,

For Amos went down as if he'd been shot.

You see, Mr. Day, he couldn't git a devorce

'Count o' havin' signed a paper agreein' to a separation when his wife left him,
An' that queered his case accordin' to law.
An' here he might ha' been married to Mrs. Richards for two years anyway,
If he'd ha' know'd.
I can't think how he didn't, 'cept that 'twas in a Portland paper I read it
One time when I was down that way.
'Twas enough to upset any man comin' on him suddin like that,
But I warn't prepared for his way o' takin' it.
I hadn't had time to think o' th' half o' what I'm tellin' you
When he was up an' runnin' at me with a chair.
"Get out!" he screamed, "you get out or I'll smash you into hell."
Chair for chair, I was no match for him,
It was just dodge an' run for me.

When I got to the door I made a dash for it,
An' I'd just got my car goin' when he reached me,
But a motor on high ain't a thing to fool with
An' I got away.
I druv for all th' car was worth to Parson Eldridge's
An' telled him th' whole story.
He got a posse o' men together an' off we all went back
to Amos's.
But we couldn't find him anywheres about th' place.
Parties searched th' woods, and th' ponds was dragged,
But we never come on a thing, not till this day.
Nobody knows if he's dead or livin'.
All th' towns for miles was notified,
But he warn't never found,
No one ain't ever see hair or hide of him since that
day.
That was six Summers come next,
An' anybody you don't know's dead ain't lawfully
such for I don't know how many years,

So nothin' couldn't be done with his effects.
Ther' stood th' house an' them fearsome picters
Any one could see 'em through th' winders if they was
lookin' for 'em,
An' they was scary as I can't tell ye.
It got to be a dare with th' little fellers to go out an'
peek,
An' some o' th' boys couldn't sleep nights for 'em.
After John Baxter's youngest screamed himself into
fits,
Th' selectmen took it on themselves to order th' walls
papered.
'Twouldn't injure his property none to put it on, they
'lowed,
He could rip it off when he come back, if he'd a mind
to.
Th' house must ha' been jerrybuilt to have fell away
so in th' time,
But that was kind o' like Amos's life, warn't it?

'Twas jerrybuilt clear through, I guess.
But you just thank your stars for them rosebuds,
that's all.

THE CONVERSION OF A SAINT

"Why, Sallie Williams,
I'm proper glad to see ye.
Go straight in t' th' clock-room,
I blazed a fire in ther' this afternoon to take th' chill off
An' it's nice an' warm.
Now you set right down in th' red plush rocker
An' git your breath,
You look all beat out.
Just you set still an' rest
And I'll run out t' th' kitchen
And git ye a good strong cup o' tea an' some cookies.
I won't be a minute."

"You're real good, Lidy,
But I don't hold with snacks between meals,

Never did, an' I don't dar'st begin now.
Th' tea'll be enough an' plenty.
I been a long walk
An' I do feel a mite tired."

"I'll leave th' door open
So's we can talk through.
It's been some consid'able time since you was here,
All of two months, I do b'lieve.
I was goin' to git Oren to drive me into town
For a visit with you one o' these days.
However did you happen out here?
On foot too.
We ain't so young as we was, you an' me."

"We ain't, Lidy, that's a fact,
Though I keep pretty spry, consid'rin'."

"It's awful ugly footin' this time o' year,
Th' roads ain't dry yet.
A couple more weeks should harden 'em.
Now you just drink that,
I made it fire-strong a-purpose,
As Father used to say."

"It's real revivin',
I feel better a'ready."

"To think o' your trapesin' way out here,
An' in your best magenta silk too.
I must say I take it very kind.
But 'pears like we be gittin' strangers
When you have to dress up for me."

"To tell th' truth, Lidy,
You ain't just th' reason I put on this dress.

I had another,
But I'm most afraid to tell it."

"Don't you be silly, an' le' me take your cup.
This ain't no time o' day to be keepin' things from me.
Wa'n't you th' first I told
When I brought my mind to marry Oren,
An' ain't I been sharin' my troubles with ye ever since!
You got somethin' on your mind, Sallie,
I thought as much when you first come in.
Now you tell me right out what 'tis.
We're old to be hangin' back with one another
An' I'm bound to git it sooner or later.
If you didn't come out a-purpose to see me
What did you come for?
Ther' ain't nobody else to visit out this way
As I'm aware."

"Ther's a lot o' folks, Lidy,
Only they're dead.
You're forgittin' th' buryin'-ground."

"Sakes alive! What be you a-doin' to th' buryin'-ground?
I didn't know you ever went near it
'Cep' on Decoration Day."

"I never did before.
I wanted to see Miss Ziba's grave."

"Miss Ziba's grave!
Well, you do take me all aback.
I al'ays thought you hated her."

"Hate ain't no word for th' way I felt 'bout that woman.

That's why I wanted to see her grave."

"I don't sense your meanin', Sallie.
You'd best begin right at th' beginnin'
An' tell me straight through."

"I guess I'll have to.
It's preyin' on me somethin' awful.
What's done's done, an' I'm glad,
But I'm kind o' scared too.
Lidy, you promise you won't tell a soul,
Not even Oren."

"I won't, if it'll ease you. Ther'!
Now you git it right out, dear,
I'm listenin'."

"You mind th' trouble, Lidy?"

"Don't I? Why even us girls was all sides 'bout it.
I've never had nothin' to do with Hannah Williams
Nor Addie Belle Dyer since."

"Well, that trouble sp'iled my life.
I never telled you how it laid on me.
I couldn't bring myself to speak on't even to you.
But it's been a dwellin' horror all my life,
Like a ghost-story,
Only 'twas I was ha'nted, not a house.
It begun when I was goin' on ten year old.
Miss Ziba'd al'ays been friendly with my folks,
I used to call her Aunt Ziba.
She made lovely paper-dolls;
Many's th' Sat'day afternoon I spent over to her house
Playin' with 'em,
An' an old doll's-house she had when she was a little
girl.

Then all at once it come, th' quarrel.
Mother telled me I wa'n't never to go to Miss Ziba's
agin.
I mind how she looked when she said it,
Not like Mother at all, but a stranger.
That look chilled me clear to th' marrer,
I git th' shivers now, thinkin' of it.
'Twas as if Mother was hid away an' someone else'd
took her place,
I ain't never had a shock to beat that,
So lonely as 'twas, an' never been nothin' else since,
not once.
I ran away up garret an' cried all afternoon.
I don't run now,
Habit keeps folks quieter if that's all it does.
One day I met Miss Ziba out walkin'
An' she stared right through me as if I wa'n't ther'.
That made me feel creepy
As though I wa'n't ther' myself.

O' course in a village like ours
You can't help meetin's,
But I never got used to Miss Ziba actin's though she could put her foot right down on me
An' feel th' boards under, just th' same.
I used to look in t' th' windows o' Mr. Gale's shop
To see if I could see myself in 'em
After she'd gone by.
Then th' girls begun.
Addie Belle took a notion to stick her tongue out at me
Whenever Miss Price' back was turned.
She'd do it a dozen times a forenoon.
An' then she an' Hannah Williams'd h'ist up their desk tops, an' whisper an' giggle behind 'em
Till Miss Price ketched 'em at it.
Tricky wa'n't th' word for them two.
Hannah'd say she wanted a drink an' ast to go out to th' well;
She had to pass me to git to th' door,

An' goin' an' comin' she'd give me a nasty pinch.
I'd ha' complained to Miss Price, only I darsn't,
Knowin' ther' was somethin' 'bout me,
Somethin' terrible, an' I couldn't guess what.
If it hadn't ha' been for you an' one or two o' th' others
I think I'd ha' died for shame."

"Why, Sallie dear, you're tremblin'.
I hadn't no knowledge you took it so hard.
We wouldn't let Addie Belle or Hannah
See our poppy-shows, I remember.
You said they shouldn't see yours for a whole packet o' pins.
I've laughed over it lots o' times since."

"I expect you thought my dander was up, Lidy,
An' it ought to ha' been.
But th' peth was all gone out o' me,

I wanted to cry all th' time,
An' I wouldn't ha' gone to school
Only Mother made me."

"What was it all about anyway?
I don't b'lieve I ever heerd."

"That's th' awful part.
I don't know no more'n th' dead.
I ast Mother once, but she wouldn't say a word,
An' th' look she give me settled me not to ast agin,
'Twas like th' first time only worse.
Mother an' me wa'n't never th' same after.
I couldn't feel to love her like I should
With that secret in between."

"Sallie! You don't say!
An' you an' your Mother livin' alone together twenty
year;

It must ha' been all o' that."

"It was, twenty-three.
We lived together, but we didn't speak,
Not really speak, I mean.
I used myself for her hard as I could,
But that was all ther' was to it.
I've al'ays been good at flourishin' flowers
An' Mother liked a posy by her bed,
But them flowers was th' nearest we come to speakin'.
I wa'n't no lonelier after she died
Than I was with her livin'.
Did I hate Miss Ziba, Lidy?
'Tis past expressin', I tell ye.
Wa'n't it her took my Mother away from me,
An' all th' youth an' splendour I'd a right to?
Girls needs cossetin' all through th' growin' years
But I didn't never have any,
An' I just lost heart for gay times an' junketin's.

I was a sort o' Ishmael to my own seemin'.
I read his story every night 'fore I went to bed one
Winter,
He got to be a kind o' blood cousin,
An' th' thought of ther' bein' another of us comforted
me some.
If it hadn't ha' been for you, Lidy —
But ther', if it hadn't been so between us
I wouldn't be here now, tellin' ye.
Don't mind me, dear, tears is a help sometimes,
An' I feel dretful low-sperited."

"But what about th' buryin'-ground, Sallie?"

"Yes, th' buryin'-ground. I'm comin' to that.
When I heerd last Tuesday Miss Ziba was dyin'
It acted like a crust broke up in me somewheres,
I was so rej'iced 'twas like a jubilee.
I tried to pray aginst it,

But 'twa'n't no use.

I was as happy as though I'd heerd trumpetin' angels

Callin' me to dance before th' ark,

Th' way they done in th' Bible.

I couldn't go to th' buryin', nat'rally,

But I watched it from th' garret window

Windin' up along,

An' when I couldn't see it no more

I went an' got out this dress

An' pressed it nice an' tidy, an' put new lace to th' neck an' sleeves.

Ther' was somethin' I had to do, Lidy.

You needn't feel obleeged to remark it none,

'Cause I had to do it.

I'd got to feelin' old scores must be paid,

An' I was goin' to pay 'em for keeps.

I waited a couple o' days

Till I 'lowed all th' tendin' an' visitin'd be done

An' nothin' left to fix but th' stone,

An' you couldn't expect that for some weeks;
Asa Frye makes real pleasin' stones, but he's slow.
When I got up this mornin' an' see what a day 'twas,
With th' wind Southerly an' th' snow-drops up an' noddin',
I know'd 'twas just time.
So I dressed me all up,
Same's I planned,
An' come right along up here to th' buryin'-ground.
I can't go on, Lidy.
It's too dretful now.
Don't, don't let me go on.
Lidy, you mustn't let me go on,
I can't do it."

"There now, dearie, don't you fret.
You better tell it all out,
It's th' holdin' in's hurtin' ye.
What'd you do, Sallie?

I want to know complete."

"It's awful, Lidy,
A great deal more awful'n you'd think 'twould be.
I walked right up to Miss Ziba's grave an' — kicked it.
Th' earth was all soft, o' course,
An' mounded up th' way they al'ays leaves 'em.
I kicked that soft loam hard's ever I could,
An' I kep' kickin' till I made a big hole.
When I got through I felt as light as air,
All my hate was gone.
I was all full up with lovin' kindness.
Then I went to work an' filled up that hole with my
bare hands
An' come right over to you.
Oh, Lidy, don't look at me like that!
I had to do it, an' I feel so happy,
So diff'rent from common,
Like ther' was wings on my feet

An' my eyes peerin' to a sunrise."

"But 'twas wicked, Sallie,
A wicked, wicked thing.
I don't see how you, a church member,
Could bring yourself to do such a thing."

"Neither do I.
Half of me's just as shocked as you be,
But th' other half's so glad I could clap my hands."

"Don't, Sallie.
It ain't like you.
'Tis a very wrong thing to meddle with a grave.
Oh, whatever shall you do now
With such a mem'ry?
Poor little Sallie!
Poor child! I can't see my way at all."

"Now don't you go on like that, Lidy.
Half of me's happy an' I ain't wishful to lose it.
You were plumb right,
Tellin' you's done me a heap o' good.
Th' happy half's drowndin' out th' other quicker every minute.
What am I goin' to do?
I settled that when I was pressin' out my dress.
I'm goin' to take in boarders.
I do enjoy havin' company around.
I sent a couple o' notices to the Boston papers yesterday.
I'll bring th' answers right along to you
Soon's I git any.
P'raps I can git a real nice young man,
An' maybe a mother an' daughter.
I should love to have a romance goin' on
Right under my own roof.

That house has had nothin' but gloomy things happen
in it
Long's I can remember.
Now I'm goin' to give it smilin' things if I can git to
do it."

"But, Sallie, what will th' minister say?
You can't go on goin' to meetin'
With this on your mind.
You'll have to tell him."

"I shan't do no such a thing.
I guess I'll give up goin' to meetin' for a spell.
I been steady at it all my life,
But I can't see's any good come from it.
I'm goin' to be a errin' sperit for th' rest o' my
days,
Hell can't be no worse nor what I've had;
Anyhow, I'm goin' to resk it.

If th' boardin' works, maybe I'll take a house down to Boston

An' keep at it Winters.

Oh, we're goin' to have a beautiful time, Lidy!

An' I'll git my folks to hire Oren's automobile for picnics an' things.

My! If ther' ain't Oren now, drivin' in t' th' barn.

I must be goin' on along home.

Don't you tell him, Lidy.

If I'm goin' to live with a sin on my conscience

Th' fewer knows it th' better.

An' don't you worrit 'bout me a mite,

Like's not I'll be sorry as can be one o' these days,

But I can't see my way to it now.

I'll be up agin soon's th' answers come.

Ain't th' snow-drops lovely with th' moon on 'em?

I don't know as I rec'lect a forwarder Spring,

Ther'll be cherry-blows in next to no time.

No, I won't stay, dear.

I'll just git me a bit o' supper,

An' set that new knittin' stitch on a needle 'fore I go to bed.

I'm so glad I come in."

THE GRAVESTONE

"THAT was a funny thing. I guess you were startled
Finding it that way underneath the stairs."

"Startled I was, and something a good deal more.
For I was thinking of nothing but my ball
And how I couldn't say that I had lost it
Not being allowed to play with it indoors.
I didn't want a licking or a lecture,
But mightily I wanted back my ball,
And fumbling round there in the dark I touched
Stone, shivering stone, a cold long stretch of slate,
Waist-tall, about, going clear down to the floor.
I hardly dared to trust the feel of it,
So I struck a match and there it was, a head-stone
With writing on it, good, square, marching letters;

I saw that much before the match went out.
The dark was rather awful afterwards.
Being twelve years old by our Bible, and a healthy chap,
I didn't really suppose that any one
Was buried there under Grandfather's staircase,
But I couldn't help thinking a little it might be so.
It might — and then I went and got a candle.
Of course there wasn't any grave; the stone
Just stood there, leaning up against the stair-back,
Dusty the way old furniture is dusty,
House-dust, you know, not weather-dust, no rain
Had run its mark upon it, top to bottom;
There were no bird-stains, nor snail trails, nor anything
Like creeper smears, it might have been a table
Without its legs, shoved out of the way in there,
But for the letters. They were plain enough,
And so I read them: 'Here lies the mortal body

Of Joseph Crocker, entered into rest . . .'
After that came a gap with nothing on it,
Where the surface was all neatly scraped and chiselled
So that the date was gone, but down below
I read again: 'Beloved Son of Joel
And Maryum Crocker,' and then there came some poetry,
A hymn, I think, but I don't remember that;
My mind was taken up with Joseph Crocker
Whose tombstone stood here like a table-top
Gathering household dust under the stairs.
I crept out, sober enough, as you may think,
And left the ball behind me with the stone.
A stone without a grave didn't seem religious;
It shocked me, and I couldn't figure why.
I didn't like the fact of its being there,
With all the family going up and down
Over the legend of a 'mortal body,'

Which wasn't there as it should have been, and
shouldn't;
That would be worse, of course, and yet more fitting.
It was rather a nasty riddle for a boy
Of twelve, set down so in the family Bible,
And as the sixth James Crocker. But that was why
I knew immediately I couldn't take it
As an omen or anything like that. I couldn't
Recollect a single Joseph. We had Johns,
And Amoses and Joels, and lots of others,
But not a Joseph could I bring to mind.
Yet it would seem that once there must have been one,
For people don't keep gravestones as ornaments
With fancy names on them, at least, not now,
Perhaps they used to, that I didn't know.
I didn't like it anyway, and after a time
I liked it so little I screwed my courage up
To speak to Grandfather. How well I see
The old book-room, with the October sun

Shining on gold and leather up and down
The walls, and getting a sort of extra spryness
From the crimson maple-leaves outside the window.
The fire, a sunny fire, crackled and tried
To burn with solar brilliance, and impress
As white a star in the balls of the brass andirons.
Grandfather was smoking and reading as he always did
Just before sunset until supper time.
I sidled in and wandered round the room
Staring at the book-backs I knew by heart,
And fingering the pistols Great Uncle John
Had used in Egypt on his famous tour,
And pretty soon Grandfather saw me there.
'Well, Jim,' said he, taking his spectacles off,
'What do you want here at this time of day?'
That was a good beginning, I knew the signs,
Twelve years might say a word to seventy
When seventy laid its spectacles aside.
I ventured round the table and sat down

Gingerly in the writing-table chair,
And perching on its edge I said my word,
Somewhat in haste as doing a fearful thing,
And one not altogether warranted,
But which admitted of a subtle doubt
As to its perfect impropriety.
Armed with this doubt to cover my intrusion,
If such it were, on ground where trespassers
Would not be welcomed, I advanced my query.
'Grandfather,' said I, for I was in it then,
Committed to the hazard of even chances,
'Why do you keep a gravestone under the stairs?'
My ears sang in the silence that came after.
The ticking of the banjo clock on the chimney
Was brass and fury banging on chill doom.
The fire roared like a great conflagration.
But Grandfather put his finger-tips together
And carefully tapped them one upon another.
Then he looked up and smiled, and with a sigh

I settled my unbroken back against the chair-back,
Wondering a little, but vastly comforted,
And found the fire good, and the sun most pleasant,
And thought how pretty all the gold and calf-skin
Book-backs were looking, and the maple-tree
Crimson-red, standing outside the window.
'So you've found the tombstone,' Grandfather was
saying,
When I got back enough to listen to him
After considering the beauty of the world
And all its special attributes just there
And then, where I was at the moment sitting.
'It's a curious tale, my boy, but you shall have it,
It will tell you something of your family.
You know, of course, we're comfortably off,
Very well off indeed. Well, we owe that
To thrifty forebears. Prudence was their motto.
They saved their pennies, perhaps a bit too much
For modern notions. My great-grandfather

Was a certain Joel Crocker, a driving man
Who farmed this place and pulled good crops by force
Of will out of the rocks, and made them yield
More profit by double than his neighbours' land,
Or they themselves, could ever learn the trick of.
He worked the farm alone with his two sons.
James, a steady lad, was like his father,
But Joseph favoured his mother's people more.
He wasn't wild or bad, but he hated farming,
And used to steal what time he could to read
Geography, always geography, he was daft about it,
Could name the cities of China like a teacher,
And tick off rivers as fast as you could count,
While as to exports and imports, you couldn't stump
him
Jumping all round the map. He used to draw
India and Asia from memory, and all the Islands
That men then knew of in the Pacific Ocean,
And give them to his mother, and she would frame them

With bits of silk and ribbon from her piece-bag
And hang them in her bedroom. It didn't please Joel
To have him do it, but after all 'twas better
Than hanging round the store where they kept a bowl
Of rum punch on the counter all the time.
So Joel said nothing, and Joseph made his maps.
One Winter, James came down with a sudden fever.
Three days sufficed, poor chap, for him to turn
His toes up, and there was an end of James,
The very darling of his father's heart.
Old Joel was staggered, James was more than the apple
Of his eye, more like the eye itself he was,
The ripe, sweet kernel of his father's soul.
As I have said, Joel was a thrifty man,
And hated like blazes to part with hard-earned money;
But James, the rapture of his life, was dead.
He had not given much to James when living,
It had not been his way, but now he grieved
At things he did not speak of, only he went

A whole day's journey down to Nashua
To Jacob Crufts, the mason, and ordered a stone
Of fine blue slate to put at James's grave.
Well, by and by, the stone came home, but somehow
Jacob had blundered at the name and carved
"Joseph" where he should have chiselled "James."
Old Joel was just beside himself to see it.
The whole stone spoilt and the money gone for nothing.
He loaded that stone into a cart at once,
Although the sun had just that moment gone
Down behind Greyback. He wouldn't wait for supper
He was so angry, but took it in a pail,
And jogged the night long down to Nashua,
And there he got at dawn, fussed as a rooster
All spurred and spanked up for a cocking bout.
Crufts was in bed, but Joel had him out
In no time, and standing with him in the street,
He damned and tongue-lashed very handsomely,
Not caring a brass farthing who might hear.

He told Crufts he had ordered plainly "James,"
But Crufts said "No, 'twas Joseph was the name."
Joel said that couldn't be, he never thought
Of Joseph, never, and he always thought of James,
And more than usual now that he was dead.
Crufts didn't know anything about that, of course,
And said so with an acid sullenness,
Business was business, and his was making grave-
stones.
Joel, being a father, knew which son was dead
As he insisted. Crufts, a dogged man,
Replied that might be so or not, he couldn't say,
But Joseph was the name was given him.
"Joseph's alive," roared Joel. "That's a pity,"
Admitted Crufts, "for it's a handsome stone."
Joel said he wouldn't pay a cent for it,
Crufts might have it back, but Crufts declared
It was no use to him, which fact indeed
Was evident. Finally when they'd been at it

Hot and heavy for an hour or more,
Crufts was visited by inspiration.
"But you have a son named Joseph," he shouted out,
"And he'll die some day, keep the stone for him."
Joel, indignant, pointed to the date,
"He'll die some time," he said, "but not that time.
That's passed." A quivering argument to plant
In the other's bosom. Poor Crufts scratched his head.
Then suddenly he swore, "By Gum! I have it!
The date's done shaller, I can cut it out.
You take the stone at half price, and set it by
Till such time as it's needed. And I'll make another
And put 'James' on it right as a trivet this time."
So the bargain was struck with no great satisfaction
On either side, but the best that could be done.
The stone with "James" was set up in the graveyard,
And the "Joseph" stone put by for later use.
Now whether it was the presence of his gravestone
Here in the house, or the lonesomeness now James

Was gone, or what it was, Joseph grew moody.
He couldn't stand the farm, he almost sickened
At staying on it, and one fine Summer morning
He ran away to Portsmouth and went to sea.
He came back three years later for a week,
But after that he never came again,
And they heard at last that his ship and every soul
On board of her was lost. Joel was sorry,
Of course, but no one ever rightly knew
Which he was sorrier for, the loss of Joseph
Or the fact that now he couldn't use the tombstone.
However, after his first grief was over,
He used to say, "There'll be another Joseph
Some day, and they'll be glad to have this gravestone
Handy, so they won't have to buy another."
But he was wrong, there's been no other Joseph,
It seems like flying in the face of Fate
To give a boy a name that's on a tombstone,
As if you put him like money in a bank

Waiting until it's called for. No Crocker woman
Would name a son of hers Joseph. No, Jim,
There never will be another Joseph Crocker.'
Then I, with all the bravery of twelve,
Rose from my chair and solemnly averred
That I would name my first son Joseph. But
I have not kept that vow, though I've five sons.
Do you think my wife would ever agree to Joseph?
A bachelor is prodigal with vows,
Wait till you're married, my friend, and you will see."

THE REAL ESTATE AGENT'S TALE

The furniture goes with the house. Oh, yes.
There ain't no silver, but silver's never let,
At least I never heard of that being done.
There's lots of dishes though, and only a few
Are cracked or chipped, the owner was very careful.
She washed her plates as though they were her babies,
And everything's spick and span, just as she left it.
Maybe you'll want a little bit more comfort
In your chairs. But you can send up one or two
If these don't suit, and probably a spring sofa
For the sitting-room, the one there's hard as nails
And I don't fancy you'll like its horse-hair cover,
Folks don't to-day. My wife couldn't abide ours,
We broke it up for fire-wood long ago.
It's a pretty place, the more you look it over,

And the rent is very reasonable indeed.
Now just you let me make a note or two:
You'll take it as it stands without the sofa,
And you don't want the bed in the East Chamber,
Nor the kitchen things, and you do want an ice-chest.
Nothing more? Well, now, there's just one thing
Which may surprise you, but I wouldn't keep
That clock if I was you. Oh, it goes all right.
It hasn't missed its strike in fifty years.
I've come here every Sunday and wound it up,
Sam Gould, Miss Bartlett's nephew, told me to.
He's all that's left of the family, he and the clock,
But I don't notice he's sent for it to Boston.
It's a very handsome thing, the sort that dealers
Hunting old furniture can't get enough of —
We have a good few of the tribe up here,
Nosing about whenever there's an auction —
But for all that I wouldn't want it round.
I guess I'm mighty poor at real estating

To say a thing like that, but still I wouldn't,
Not if 'twas me. You needn't laugh, Mr. Brooks,
I've got a funny feeling about that clock.
I want to let it stop, and tie a rope
Around it good and tight just where the wood
Juts out to hold the face, and then I want
To hang it up in the old apple-tree
Outside my office and let it swing and rot
With snow, and rain, and sun, until it drops.
You think I'm mad, I guess. Well, Sir, I'm not.
But I've got my own ideas about that clock.
It's a whole hour to train time, if you care
To hear why I feel so, I'll tell you why.
That clock's been in the Bartlett family
Time out of mind, ever since Simon Bartlett
Brought it from England on one of his long voyages,
The longest voyage he ever took and the last.
He was captain of a ship trading the Indies,
Not the West Indies, of course you understand,

But the other Indies, off around Cape Horn.
This time he'd been away above two years
And back he came, slapping along as fast
As winds would blow him, expecting to be married
Soon as his ship had got her anchor down.
The war of eighteen-twelve was on and booming,
But Cap'n Si didn't know a thing about it,
Until a British ship fired plunk at him.
He made what fight he could with only muskets,
But the British ship had a bellyful of cannon,
And pretty soon 'twas strike or go down flyin',
So Cap'n Si, being prudent, hauled his flag.
They put a prize crew on him just for luck,
And off he went under the Union Jack,
And found himself clapped into Dartmoor jail,
With no way of sending word back to his Sweetheart
That he wasn't hobnobbing down with Davy Jones.
They let him out after the war was over.

He'd made some money carving little toys,
For sailors in those days knew how to whittle
And visitors were always keen on buying,
And I guess he had some more sewed in his clothes
The warden had overlooked. But all his keepsakes
Were gone, the presents he was bringing home
To give his bride. He wouldn't come empty-handed,
He bought this clock, now he had time again,
It seemed to him time had been all choked up,
Clogged somehow, like the wheels of a dirty watch,
While he had been in prison. He might have thought
Amanda would have married, but he didn't,
And she hadn't. So that at least was right as rain,
And they set up housekeeping with the clock.
You bet he wound it every week, he wouldn't
Have let it stop for a hundred thousand dollars.
He'd got time back, and he meant to hold on to it.
He did, being over a hundred when he died.

And I don't suppose the jail seemed more than five minutes
When he looked back. He'd given up sea-faring
And moved quite a ways inland, to Nashua,
And then on here to Franklin. Here he stuck,
And here his folks have been sticking ever since,
Till Sam Gould went away and Miss Bartlett died.
The Bartlett family just lived by that clock.
You never caught one of them being late
For meals, or getting up, or going to bed.
The clock was in at all the goings on.
No Bartlett woman was married from a church,
They used to stand the minister in front
Of the clock to marry them, and all the guests
Looked right into that clock face all the time
The wedding was going on, and ten to one
The clock would strike and you couldn't hear a thing
Was said. It was the same with christenings.
Every Bartlett baby was baptized

In front of the clock, and every Bartlett corpse
Got prayed off into Heaven with that clock
Tick-tocking up above, and striking too,
Funerals weren't more serious to Bartletts
Than the clock's striking. I've heard my mother say
They purposely arranged to have it so.
It really was uncanny how their lives
Moved and circled about that grim old clock.
Bartletts were born, and Bartletts died, but the clock
Was always the same, it never changed a bit.
When I was a boy I used to come with Sam
And stand for hours watching those rocking ships
Up there. But when Sam's father died and I
Saw those ships rocking up above his coffin
They turned me sort of sick, I wanted to smash them.
That clock was treated as if it was alive,
And there it stood, grinning with all its ships,
Not caring a brass farthing what occurred
To any one. I got a hunch that day

That the clock had a nasty soul, that it liked to watch
The family like puppets in a show
And that some day it would get bored and do
Some horrid thing. It was a curious fancy,
Wasn't it? But maybe I was righter
Than I could ever dare believe I was.
The Bartletts owned a lot of land round here,
Old Si had spread himself when it came to land.
Some of it was farm, some woodland, some was nothing,
And kept as such for a full century.
I guess the Captain started the first store
They had here. He did a thriving trade
In groceries, and calicoes, and hardware,
But somehow the family drifted out of business
And long before my day they'd sold the store
And only kept the farm. But the new West
Cut farming into bits all through this country.
Only some folks don't know when they've had enough

And the Bartlett family hated change like poison.
George Bartlett, having only girls, the neighbours
Used to wonder what would happen when he died.
At first, of course, they thought the girls would marry,
And Jane, the youngest, did — but not a farmer,
Her husband was the doctor here, and a good one,
But country practice ain't a roarin' gold mine.
Still it kept them, and Jerusha found a man
To rent the farm, and things went on like that
For a good many years. Then the doctor died
And left his wife and Sam without a cent.
Jerusha took them in, but the farm rent
Didn't go far with three of them, so Jerusha
Sold off her wood; not the land, you understand,
But the trees on it. The Diamond Match people
Sent saw-mills in and cut down everything.
There were miles and miles looked like the Day of Judgment,

Stumps, and dead twigs, and rotting chips, and cinders.

The city folks were mad as hops about it,

But if Jerusha cared she didn't say so.

I went to Hanover about that time,

And then to Law School. How they got the money

To send Sam down to study pharmacy,

I've only just found out. They borrowed it,

And at enormous interest. By that time

Sam's mother had died, and there was just those two,

Sam and Miss Bartlett, with the measly farm rent

To carry them. Miss Bartlett made it do,

Pinching along on next to nothing here

Till Sam got his diploma. Just a year

After he'd started working in a drug-store,

The man who rented the farm got sick and died.

And there was poor Miss Bartlett with no money,

Not a single dollar bill that she could count on,

And owning acres and acres of useless land!

If dirt was only dollars now — but it isn't.
Land-poor she was, and a very bad case of it.
Of course she meant to let the farm again,
But no one wanted it, and her wood land
Was nothing but a six years' growth of saplings.
One afternoon Miss Bartlett sent me word
She wanted to see me. So I went right down
And had a talk with her. She told me everything
And asked me whether I could sell her land.
I didn't think I could, and said so frankly.
"Martin," says she, "I'll give you just six months,
If it ain't sold then, I know what I will do."
Now she might have meant she'd join Sam in the city,
Or take in washing, or go out for a housekeeper.
But she didn't mean any of those things,
She meant she'd kill herself. I don't know how
I got that, but I did. She might sell land,
The same as you might have your teeth pulled out,
But she couldn't leave that house. It seemed to me

As though she and the clock were wound together
And the house was the shell of both. The clock was ticking
In the silence that followed after she had spoken.
It ticked so loud I heard it in the parlour
Where we were sitting. It seemed as though her heart
Was ticking with it somehow, or that what
I listened to was not the clock at all
But her heart beating, pounding on the silence
To break it down. 'Twas fearfully uncanny,
And when I left her and went into the entry
There were those everlasting ships rocking and rocking,
And telling me something plainly all the time.
I couldn't pass them, and I got the notion
That they were shouting at me I could sell
The old land if I dared — just if I dared.
I hauled my feet away at last, and when

I got outside I called myself some names
I wouldn't like another man to call me.
I thought I knew the clock was only fancy,
But I couldn't shake the idea of Miss Bartlett.
I knew I'd got that right, it was suicide
She had in mind. You bet I didn't leave
A stone unturned about selling that land.
I advertised it out of my own pocket.
Five months went by and I was almost crazy,
And then one morning I landed a customer.
He was rich as mud and mad as a March Hare,
He wanted rural solitude, he said.
I told him he would find it at the farm
And he agreed he should. But, mad as he was,
I couldn't plant on him a single acre
Of that poor spindly, second-growth wood land.
What ever had been the farm he wanted badly,
But he wouldn't touch a yard of anything else.
I didn't blame him, the wood lots were a sight,

And 'twas luck you couldn't see them from the farm-
house.
For Miss Jerusha couldn't touch the farm trees
They being rented at the time, you remember.
I tell you, Sir, I simply soaked that fellow,
I made him pay twice what the farm was worth.
And he stood for it, he liked the place so much.
Well, that was that, and he had signed the deed
A good two weeks before the month was up.
It was a Saturday I took it over
To get Miss Bartlett's signature. I can't forget
How quiet and genteel the old house looked,
With the lilacs by the door all in full bloom
And the window-beds with their red-and-yellow tulips
The way they'd always been. When I was a boy
I never could pass that yard without looking in
To see Miss Bartlett's flowers and sniff the scent of
them.
I used to smell it for hours afterwards.

I felt as though I'd gained a lot of time
That day and I didn't hurry to ring the bell.
But when I did, and Miss Bartlett opened the door,
The entry seemed as black as pitch to me
Coming in from the sunlight, and the tick
Of that infernal clock seemed to break the air
The same as you break water skipping pebbles,
I could scarcely hear Miss Bartlett greeting me,
And when I looked at her I half expected
To see the ships rocking upon her forehead.
I got myself together in a minute
And gave her the papers and showed her where to sign
them.
It took an age, I thought, and then I found
That I was breathing in time to the ticking clock
And counting — counting. I'd got to eighteen hun-
dred
Before she finished. Then I tried to say
Something appropriate, but nothing came.

Miss Bartlett was like an image run inside
By clockwork. Her face was wax — wax-white,
And wax-still too, she thanked me like a doll
Who speaks because you press it.
I'd saved her life, perhaps, and yet I seemed
To be pressing it out at the very instant.
At any rate, there was nothing more to do
And I got up. Miss Bartlett got up with me
And walked to the door, and for some sudden reason
Turned round and went directly to the clock.
She had the papers still, and she held them up
Before the clock-face with a curious gesture,
Defiance it might have been, or supplication.
It had a nasty look to me, the way
She braced herself and cringed at the same time,
Like I was watching some beastly ceremony,
With torture in it and things one wouldn't think of.
I might be seeing a heathen devotee
Making oblation to a heathen god,

A wood and metal thing without a soul
But furious with abominable intention.
Ten breaths I counted before the clock fell over.
It started to strike, then with a hideous screech
Of grating wheels and rapping bells, it tottered,
Poised on its edge and suddenly came down
And crashed Miss Bartlett with it to the floor.
I got it off her somehow, she was breathing
And muttering something. When I stooped to hear,
She whispered, "Go and put the clock up, Martin.
Put it up before you touch me." And I did.
And you would have done the same, Sir. All she wanted
Was to see that clock in place before she died.
She saw it so, but when I went to lift her
I did not lift Miss Bartlett, but a corpse
With hands and feet already growing cold.
But nothing ailed the clock. I looked at it,
Its ships were rocking, cool as cucumbers,

Over and back, over and back. I carried
Miss Bartlett into the parlour and laid her down
On the sofa, and I could hardly pass the clock
For loathing, and a sort of fear, I guess.
I passed it twice, and it was ticking softly
And purring too, it might have been a cat,
When I went out to call the doctor. They tell me
It was the wires jarring, but I know better.
Well, now you know the story, you can choose
Whether you want the clock or not. I thought so.
You'll never make me think it didn't kill her,
If there are homicidal clocks or no.
It may be foolishness, but I believe it,
Believe that clock has got a sort of mania.
If it were mine, I'd smash the case to pieces
And bury the works out under those rank saplings,
But Sam will have a word to say to that.
And now, Sir, we'll be starting for the train.

THE LANDLADY OF THE WHINTON INN TELLS A STORY

Yes, indeed, Sir,
'Tis pretty up here this time o' year,
With th' sumachs an' th' maples fer red,
An' th' birches an' th' oaks fer yaller,
Sometimes you'd think th' sun was shinin'
When 'tain't nothin' but leaves.
Ef you was to go up Tollman's hill,
You'd see th' country layin' out in front o' yer
Jest like a big flower garden.
I don't wonder city folks is so partial to th' mountains
in th' Fall.
But they don't all care enough fer it
To come a-ridin' shanks's mare
The way you're doin'.
What was it you wanted I should tell yer?

Oh, yes, 'bout th' brick house over on th' Danbridge road.

I know well th' one you mean.

Sort o' tumble down, ain't it?

Run to seed?

That's th' one.

Th' old Steele farm, we call it.

It's in a dretful state.

Th' last folks had it was a pack o' Finns,

An' I never see such a shiftless set as they be.

Don't seem to have no idea o' nothin'.

But th' way they can grub a livin' outer stones

Do beat all.

Ther's a whole lot on 'em settled around here,

But I guess they wouldn't ha' got aholt o' th' Steele place

Only fer it havin' a kind o' bad name.

Sort o' got set in a streak o' cross luck, somehow.

You hitch your chair up clost t' th' fire,

And I'll tell yer 'bout it.

It's a funny story;

An' it ain't so funny neither,

Come to think of it.

I remember Tim'thy Adams well

When I was a girl.

He was innercent an' feeble enough by then.

My father's told me th' story often,

But it all happened long 'fore my day.

It must ha' been nigh on to eighty year ago.

Ther' was two brothers livin' over to Danbridge at that time,

Name of Steele.

George an' Clif Steele.

Between 'em, they owned that farm you seen,

An' a hardware store to Main Street.

My father used ter say

Nobody hereabouts thought they could cut a rakeful o' hay

Or split a log,

Onless they'd bought th' scythe, or th' saw, or th' sickle,

To Steele's.

Funny name for a hardware store, warn't it,

But them things do happen.

Well, as I said,

They owned th' store an' th' farm, 'tween 'em,

Old Steele left it that way.

But 'twas real onhandy,

An', nat'rally, they kep' a-treadin' on each other's toes.

So 'bout th' time I'm speakin' of,

They made up their minds to do th' splittin' therselves,

An' they'd fixed it up that George was to have th' store

An' Clif was to take th' farm.

Clif warn't more'n five an' twenty, then,

An' he warn't married,

An' he seen, well as another,
That a farm without a wife's a mighty ticklish thing.
So he told his brother
He'd look around a bit,
And when he found a likely woman,
He'd marry her,
An' settle right away.
I guess he warn't quite square 'bout th' lookin' around,
'Cause everyone knowed he'd be'n keepin' comp'ny
Fer some time.
Mirandy Eccles, 'twas;
And Father al'ays said she was a fine, sensible girl,
And a credit to th' man that chose her.
Clif used ter take her buggy-ridin'
With a fast sorrel mare he had,
Done two thirty or somethin'
Over to th' County Fair.
Clif was proud as punch of her, an' of th' girl too.
Father said th' whole street 'ud set up to look

When they two druv along it
Like a streak o' lightnin'.
Clif thought his courtin' was goin' elegant,
An' I guess 'twas,
When all of a suddint,
He was drawed for jury duty.
That put a stop to th' junketin's,
An' Clif was like a bear with a sore head.
'Twas a kind of a queer case.
A man called Tim'thy Adams was bein' tried
Fer 'saulting his employer an' stealin' four dimonds.
I don't rec'lect th' name o' th' man whose store 'twas,
But he was a jeweler an' watch-maker,
Th' only one ther' was to Danbridge.
One mornin' they found him most beat to a jelly,
An' bound an' gagged,
An' four big dimonds was missin' outer th' stock.
Ther' was a candle in th' store
Guttered to nothin',

An' Mrs. ——— th' storekeeper's wife —

Said when she last seed it,

Jest as she was goin' to bed,

It was good an' long,

An' would ha' burned a couple o' hours, anyway.

Tim'thy used to come mornin's an' open up th' store.

He had a key,

An' that was th' only other one ther' was,

So suspicion fastened on him, good an' tight.

He said he hadn't be'n ther' at all

Sence closin' time.

That he'd be'n fer a walk up th' mountain.

But he hadn't be'n gunnin',

'Cause he didn't take no gun;

An' he hadn't be'n fishin',

'Cause he didn't take no pole;

An' nobody b'lieved a man 'ud go walkin' up th' moun-

tain

Jest fer th' pleasure o' gittin' ther',

So it looked bad fer Tim'thy.

Clif set in that Court Room,

An' twiddled his fingers,

An' thought o' Mirandy,

An' never heerd so much as a haystraw o' th' evidence,

An' when lockin'-up time come,

He didn't know no more about th' case

Than th' town pump.

In them days,

Juries was locked up fer fair.

They didn't 'low 'em home nights,

An' they sent their meals in,

'Stead o' marchin' 'em out to a hotel.

Clif had got awful sick o' bein' ther'.

He'd cut his name on th' table in th' jury room

Till 'twas all pickled over with it,

(I've seed th' table, with th' name on, myself,)

An' th' night after th' ev'dence was in,

Ther' was a dance to th' Town Hall,

An' Clif wanted like pisen to be ther'.

He set in that jury room,

Hackin' at th' table,

Till he couldn't stand it another minit,

Then he jumped outer th' winder,

An' shinned down a big elm-tree was outside,

An' went to th' party,

An' th' first person he run acrost when he got inter th' room

Was th' Judge!

That was a awful fix fer Clif,

But th' Judge had be'n young once,

An' he jest turned his back, an' never seed a thing.

Clif didn't waste no time.

He went straight up to Mirandy an' asked her to marry him,

An' she'd missed him so,

She said "yes" right out,

An' Clif went back, an' shinned up th' elm agin,

An' ther' he was, spick an' span,
When th' door was unlocked next mornin'!
But he hadn't voted on th' case,
An' th' foreman jest whispered to him, would he agree,
As they went inter Court.
Clif was in such good sperrits,
He'd ha' agreed to anythin',
So he jest nodded,
An' poor Tim'thy Adams was convicted o' 'sault an' batt'ray,
With stealin',
An' sent to State's Prison fer twenty year.
I told you 'twas a queer story,
But it's a heap queerer than you've heerd yit.

Clif married Mirandy,
An' they went to live to th' farm.
They was a well-matched pair,
An' everythin' went as fine as roses in July,

'Cept they didn't have no children.

But after it had all be'n goin' on like that fer most
fifteen year,

Somethin' turned Clif's mind back to that old jury
case.

Bits o' things he'd heerd in th' Court Room

Kep' a-risin' up in his mind.

They must ha' be'n ther' all th' time,

But he'd never sensed 'em.

An' now they up an' slapped him in th' face.

Th' more he thought, th' more he felt

That Tim'thy couldn't ha' done it.

He was a bit of a dreamer himself,

An' he knowed a man could go up a mountain,

'Ithout hankerin' to shoot or fish.

He thought an' thought, Clif did,

Till he was so nervous an' jumpy,

He was all of a twitch from head to foot.

Then one day he druv over to Danbridge

To see Judge Proctor.

Th' Judge was a old man, an' retired,

But Clif thought it 'ud ease him some

To see him.

He told th' Judge all about it,

But th' Judge said 'twas past an' gone,

An' he'd better lay some of his fields down to red rye,

An' try replantin' his wood-lot.

But Clif didn't buy no red rye seed that day;

He went straight to th' lib'ry

An' read a lot o' old newspapers.

Then he ferreted out th' Court clerk,

An' fussed an' fussed,

Till he let him see th' records.

He druv back an' forth to Danbridge fer weeks,

Readin' all th' papers 'bout that trial.

An' th' more he read 'em, th' more he knowed

Tim'thy hadn't had no head nor hand to do with it.

Clif was most beside himself with worry,

An' no wonder,

He felt he'd sent a feller critter to State's Prison

Who didn't b'long ther' no more'n he did himself.

He act'ally got to feelin' he was th' one b'longed,

He'd committed a wicked crime,

An' he'd got t' expiate it.

I guess he was most mad;

Father often said so.

He was thin as a rail,

An' he couldn't eat nor sleep,

An' th' farm all went to smithereens

'Cause he hadn't no time to work it,

Fer readin' ev'dence.

He didn't know much law,

An' it 'curred to him,

That ef he got all th' jury that done th' convictin'

To change their minds,

That would stop th' sentence right where 'twas,

An' Tim'thy could walk out o' jail.

So th' poor lunatic started to git aholt o' th' jury.
'Twarn't no easy matter to do,
Fer some was moved away, an' some was dead;
But he wrote, an' he travelled,
An' he run here an' ther' like a hen without its head,
An', in th' end, he got all th' livin' members o' that jury
To sign papers reversin' their decision.
Is that very remarkable, Sir?
P'r'aps you're right.
Anyhow, he done it.
When he'd got all th' papers,
He went back to Judge Proctor,
An' asked him, would he please arrange things
So Tim'thy'd be free.
O' course, th' Judge told him 'twarn't no manner o' use.
That all th' papers in th' world wouldn't git Tim'thy out,
Onless ther' was new ev'dence,

Which, don't you see, ther' warn't,
Not a scrap.
So Clif went home, all broke to bits,
An' put his papers in th' chimbly cupboard,
An' Mirandy had all she could do
To git a little bacon an' coffee down him.
It's al'ays th' women gits it in th' end, you know,
Sir?

Well, bimeby it come time fer Tim'thy to be let out o'
jail.
He'd served his term, barrin' what was took off fer good
conduct.
Th' very day he stepped out o' prison,
Standin' d'rectly in front o' th' gate
Wher' he couldn't miss him,
Was Clif Steele.
Tim'thy was took all aback
An' made to git out o' th' way,

But Clif up an' hitched his arm inter his
An' marched him off, real brotherly.
"Tim'thy Adams," says Clif,
"I done yer a great wrong.
I know you never 'saulted nobody
An' never took no dimonds,
An' I come here to-day to make it up to yer best I can,"
he says.
"Come to yer senses, have yer?" says Tim'thy.
"Yes, I have," says Clif.
"An' I'm goin' to take yer right along home with me."
Mebbe Tim'thy wouldn't ha' gone,
Only his sperrits was all squeezed to nothin'
By bein' so long in jail.
Anyhow, Clif wouldn't hear no.
An' them two went home together
Like a pair o' old shoes.
Folks wondered, would Mirandy like it?

All I c'n say is, ef she didn't, she darsn't say so.
I guess she was some feared 'bout Clif's stayin' in his right mind.
Whatever was th' reason, she acted pleased as pie.
So th' three on 'em lived in th' brick house,
An' after a little, nobody heeded 'em no more.
But Clif was all played out;
Th' worry'd done fer him,
An' two year come th' next Winter
He died o' pneumony.

Tim'thy an' th' widder
Stuck it out fer a bit as they was.
But tongues got to waggin'
An' they must ha' heerd 'em,
Anyways, one fine day they up an' got married,
An' that settled th' talk for keeps.
Then th' good times seemed come fer Tim'thy an' Mirandy.

They warn't young no more, but they was real well suited.

Folks kind o' fergot 'bout th' jail,

An' Mirandy took a new lease o' life.

Why, th' kitchin winders was all jammed full o' flower-pots!

You never seed sich rose-geraniums,

Everybody wanted slips from 'em.

I don't know jest how it come 'bout,

But one way or 'tother, Tim'thy took to tinkerin' clocks agin.

He had a wonderful knack at makin' 'em go.

Not th' batteredest old clock as ever was, beat him.

He'd set ther' in that kitchin,

Snuffin' up th' smell o' them geraniums

An' foolin' with little wheels an' wires,

An' all of a suddint he'd have th' clock as good as new.

Most everybody has a broken clock;

Well, they brought 'em all to Tim'thy.

Th' house was full on 'em.

Now comes th' queer part,

An' ther' ain't no explainin' it, no how.

Many's th' time I've heerd my Father tell it,

But I never give over startin' when I think of it.

One day, Tim'thy was overhaulin' a fine wall clock,

Th' kind with big weights hangin' down under it,

When he give a cry,

So loud Mirandy heerd it out in th' clo'es-yard.

She come runnin' in

With her heart in her mouth,

An' ther' was Tim'thy,

Starin' as though he seed a ghost,

An' holdin' four big dimonds in his hand.

They was sparklin' like icicles on a South winder,

All green, an' blue, an' red.

Father seed 'em,

An' he said they was so bright

You could most see to read by th' flashin' they made.

"Wher'd you git them things, Tim'thy Adams?"
Mirandy hollered out.

She was struck all of a heap

An' couldn't scarcely fetch her breath fer wonder.

"Out o' th' clock," says Tim'thy, quick, as ef a bee
stung him.

"Who put 'em in?" asked Mirandy, kind o' snappin'
out th' words.

"I ain't no notion," says Tim'thy.

Now ther' was a fine fix, an' dimonds agin!

Mirandy leaned up agin th' door-jamb to save herself
from fallin' —

"Whose clock is it?" says she.

'Twas old man Smart's clock, an' Tim'thy telled her so.

Well, not to keep a-talkin' all day, they sent fer old
man Smart,

An' showed him th' dimonds.

But he said they warn't none o' his.

Tim'thy acted as ef he was afeared on 'em.

He'd put 'em on th' chimbly,
An' he wouldn't tech 'em agin, nohow.
Mirandy said she couldn't sleep with 'em in th' house,
An' ther' was a fine hurrah-boys.
Th' neighbours got wind on it somehow,
An' they all come flockin' to ask fool questions
An' git a sight o' th' dimonds.
Tim'thy seemed kind o' crazed, all to oncet.
He jest set ther', an' whispered: "In th' clock! In th' clock!"
Nobody couldn't git another thing out o' him.
Mirandy'd got to cryin' by then,
An' all th' women was soothin' her,
An' burnin' feathers under her nose.
'Twas th' awfullest mess ever was,
An' all along o' them pesky dimonds.
Somebody called in Lawyer Cary to Danbridge,
An' he took charge o' th' dimonds,
An' they got th' house cleared somehow.

But nothin' ever warn't th' same after.

Mirandy went inter a sort o' decline,

An' died 'fore Thanksgivin'.

Tim'thy didn't die, but he didn't git well neither.

He wouldn't tech a clock agin fer love nor money.

If anyone said: "Clock," he'd commence shiv'rin'

As though he had th' ague.

Then a nasty whisper got about,

You know how folks talk,

Well, 'twas said th' dimonds warn't really in th' clock at all.

That Tim'thy'd had 'em all these years,

An' that he only pretended to find 'em

So's he could sell 'em at last.

Some said 'twas a trade 'twixt him an' Clif.

Clif had kep 'em fer him while he was to State's Prison.

I guess that was all foolishness,

But what made 'em think so

Was that old man Smart 'lowed he'd bought th' clock

To a auction;

An' it turned out 'twas th' auction o' that jewel'ry store

Where Tim'thy worked.

Th' man that owned it had sold out an' gone away.

Lawyer Cary tried to trace him,

But 'twarn't a mite o' use.

He'd gone to Boston, an' they couldn't find out another thing.

But ther' was th' dimonds, an' ther' was poor old Tim'thy,

Half cracked with findin' 'em.

Property like that's a terrible nuisance.

Old man Smart wouldn't look at th' things,

An' he told how he'd burnt th' clock,

Considerin' it a sort o' party.

They warn't Tim'thy's, that was sure,

An' Lawyer Cary said he wouldn't keep 'em after New Year's.

So th' Selectmen voted to sell 'em,
An' buy books for th' lib'ry with th' money.
You c'n see 'em now, with a card in 'em:
"Bought with th' proceeds o' th' sale o' four dimonds."
I must ha' be'n 'bout ten when Tim'thy died,
I mind it well, 'cause Father told th' story at supper
Th' day they buried him,
An' I ain't never fergot it.
Ther' was some trouble 'bout th' house too.
George Steele had moved to Boston years afore
An' his daughter (he didn't have no sons) had married,
An' they had a time findin' her under her new name.
Anyhow, she didn't want th' farm, an' 'twas sold.
It's be'n goin' down hill ever sence.
Lor's Mercy! Ain't this world a queer place!
Ther' was three lives all gone to smash
Over them dimonds,
An' nothin' to show fer it but a ramshackle house,

An' a passel o' books in th' lib'ry!

Well, that's th' story,

An' I must be seein' to your supper.

It's gittin' late.

"AND PITY 'TIS, 'TIS TRUE"

"WILL they do anythin' to her, do you think,
Mirandy?"

"Do you mean prison?
No, I guess not.
That doctor from Boston said she wa'n't no ways
responsible."

"She's over to th' 'sylum, ain't she?"

"Yes, but th' doctor said she'd be right as a trivet
In a month or two."

"I never seed th' child but once,
But now I mind, it 'peared awful big fer five weeks,
ter me."

"You may say so 'Melia.
Ef you was a married woman
You'd ha' sensed right off
Somethin' was wrong.
Why 'twas all of a year an' more.
I guess that was th' reason she let you see it.
You not bein' knowin' in such things.
I ast her ter le' me look at it a hunder'd times
But she al'ays put me off
One way or another.
Bless you! She was as nervous as a witch
Fear o' bein' found out."

"Old man Drew wouldn't think nothin' o' course."

"That's why she come here.
She was safe with only her Grandsir in th' house.
He's in a terrible tew now, they say.

Eighty year old and al'ays respectable.
It do seem hard."

"How does 'Lisha take it?
He's one o' them husbands as sets a store by their
wives.
I remember his courtin',
He'd ha' pulled th' stars out o' th' sky
To lay a path so's Claribel could step easy."

"He won't hear a word agin her now.
Says 'twas his fault fer bein' 'way when 'twas born.
Eben said he jest bust out cryin'
When they tell'd him th' baby wa'n't his."

"Travels, don't he?"

"Yes, stoves.
Doin' elegant.

Only, o' course it takes him 'way most o' th' time."

"She should ha' come home fer her layin' in,
Then nothin' wouldn't ha' happened."

"I dunno.
'Tain't in nater to leave yer own home
When a baby's comin'."

"But she did leave her home, didn't she?
Went to a hospital or somethin'."

"Well, she had ter do that
Jest at th' last.
'Lisha was off West, you see,
An' somebody had to 'tend her."

"My! Ain't it a shame!
Poor little thing!

Ef she'd ha' sent fer me
I'd gone right down to Boston next train."

"Anybody would.
But she was al'ays as proud as Lucifer,
Was Claribel.
An' that baby comin' made her prouder'n ever.
Why th' letters she writ 'bout it!
I declare they sounded like th' Bible.
She was all keyed up,
Seemed she wa'n't steppin' on no common earth,
An' she most sewed her eyes out
Makin' th' clo'es.
She didn't need nobody
But jest her thoughts.
She'd kep' that baby on her mind so long
It went all to shivers when ther' wa'n't none."

"The Almighty's ways do be past understandin'.

Why couldn't her baby ha' lived, I wonder?
Most on 'em does."

"Seems she slipped on th' ice or somethin'.
Anyway th' baby was born dead.
They do say she took on 'bout it somethin' awful,
An' she wouldn't let nobody write to 'Lisha.
That doctor said they oughtn't never to ha' let her out o' th' hospital alone.
But they did,
An' she was walkin' home
When she seed a baby-carriage settin' outside a drug-store
With th' baby in it.
Th' mother'd gone inside fer a minit,
An' 'fore she knowed what she was doin'
She had th' baby in her arms an' was cuddlin' it.
She's a born mother, is Claribel,
An' her milk wa'n't dry,

An' I guess she jest couldn't put it down.
It's wicked to think o' what she must ha' suffered
To do such a thing;
But she took that baby off home with her,
An' she 'lowed to 'Lisha 'twas her own
She'd brought from th' hospital.
'Lisha was new to babies,
An' he didn't think nothin' 'bout its size."

"I wonder why she come up here?"

"To git farther away, I guess.
'Twas all right an' proper
To bring th' baby home to visit with her Grandsir fer a spell.
An' she never figured as they could trace her up here.
When anybody wanted to see th' baby
She'd say she didn't want it should be waked up.
It might ha' gone on till th' Day o' Judgment

Ef th' Sheriff hadn't been a fam'ly man."

"You don't say!"

"Yes. You see th' other mother was right down sick
with fussin',
Nat'rally.
An' she an' her husband got th' perlice on it.
An' they sent all over th' state,
An' to New York.
I guess they spent a mint o' money
Ef you was to count it.
Sheriff, he read th' papers,
An' one day he seed Claribel
In th' village
Wheelin' th' baby.
It looked awful large ter him,
An' he stopped an' ast a heap o' questions.
Claribel was at her wits' ends,

An' bimeby she muddled herself 'bout somethin',
An' he took her right into Cole's store
An' had a good look at th' baby.
That settled it.
They do say that Claribel most killed th' Sheriff
With a pitchfork was standin' ther'
'Fore they got th' baby from her.
I dunno's I blame her
She's got mother in her blood."

"Blame her! Mirandy, you'd do th' same.
So would I ef th' Lord had seed fit ter gi' me a child."

"Ther's th' other woman, 'Melia."

"Yes, that's so.
My! But th' ways of th' Almighty do beat all,
An' I al'ays says so.
Why, it's only a week ago I says to Parson Davis,

'Parson,' says I, 'ther' ain't no manner o' use
You expounding Scripture th' way you do,
Day in an' day out.
We'll never understan',' I says,
'Not till Gabriel's trump starts us all puttin' on our bunnits fer th' Resurrection.'
Mirandy, d'you s'pose Claribel 'd care fer one o' my spice cakes,
She used to be real partial to 'em?
Jason could drive over to th' 'sylum with one most any day,
Now th' apples is picked."

"So do, so do, 'Melia.
An' I'll jest slip some o' them new jars o' quince conserve into a basket
An' send 'em along too.
I got a plenty."

THE HOUSE WITH THE MARBLE STEPS

He built the house to show his neighbours
That decent thrift could lead to this,
A giddy reason for his labours,
A bright brick apotheosis.

He was not one to be bulldozed
By sentiment, and he had planned
Past whispered sneers when he foreclosed
The mortgage on this very land.

He'd forced his way with prudent greed
While they at best remained the same.
He gauged the folly of a creed
Which keeps a lame purse always lame.

Well, here it was, and in the road
He stood and tallied beam and rafter.
The cost would be a heavy load
He'd tell you, twisting into laughter.

The window-edges were of stone,
A soapy limestone smooth and fair.
The floors were all hard wood and none
Tailed off to pine beneath a stair.

If he were old and quite infirm,
His house was very fresh and young,
And envy is a winding worm —
These thoughts were pepper to his tongue.

And so he watched it grow and grow,
And jotted down the things he heard,
Scheming to balance by the blow
His house should deal as final word.

To crown the whole and go beyond
Whatever yet had been attempted
In his small town, he signed a bond
Which would most certainly have emptied

The pockets of quite half his friends.
Even to him it was a point,
But when a man aims at such ends
He must keep stiff in every joint.

He bought a quarry's good half year
Of first-class, fine-grained marble output,
He paid a mason very near
As much again to have it cut.

The sharp white polished steps were grand
Descending from the stucco porch.
They glittered like a marching band,
They mounted upward like a torch.

But he had taken to his bed
Before the last was set in place,
And one week later he was dead
With a slow smile upon his face.

The marble flashed beneath the fall
Of undertakers' feet who carried
His coffin to the funeral
Within the house. And there he tarried

For fifteen minutes more or less,
And "dust to dust" they read above him.
Now who had gained in bitterness —
For not one soul was there to love him?

They gaped upon the shining floors,
Their eyes scanned ceiling heights and blocked them.
When all was done, they shut the doors
And shrugged their shoulders as they locked them.

The house is charming now with weeds
Sprung all about, the steps are mellow
With little grass and flower-seeds
Drifting across their sun-stained yellow.

Empty it stands and so has stood
More years than the town clerk can tell.
No legend has it he was good,
No tale reports that he did well.

They've tried to sell it, off and on,
But not a person wants to buy,
Though visitors who've come and gone
Remember it against the sky
In shrewd and sweet proportions glowing
Above a flight of marble steps where grass is growing.